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**THE HIDDEN CURRICULUM OF THE
RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING: A CASE STUDY**

By

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Thesis presented for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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DEDICATION

It is with deep love and great sadness that I dedicate this thesis unreservedly to the memory of my mother and father, Jean and Malcolm Harris. I thank them for their unconditional love and for their unique and unequivocal *joie de vivre*.

ABSTRACT

This thesis is a case study of a Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) practice developed in relation to a university post-graduate level diploma course for educators of adults in a South African university.

A review of the literature reveals silences, paradoxes and contradictions around understandings of knowledge, pedagogy, power and identity in RPL. An absence of academic, empirical research at the micro-level of RPL practices is noted. The research foci are concerned with how knowledge(s), pedagogy, power and identity are understood and enacted in and around the case: selected for its intrinsic and atypical qualities and generative interest value.

The research draws theoretical resources from the sociology of education (the work of Bernstein) and from continental philosophy (the work of Foucault). It argues for and adopts a hybrid philosophical position, part social constructionist, part structuralist and part poststructuralist, and an interpretive methodology.

The RPL case in question had a hidden curriculum which rewarded particular ways of thinking and acting. It confirmed prior experiential knowledge that was similar to that valued in the context and in so doing brought the former under the rule of the latter. The RPL pedagogy was ambiguous, presenting an informal style through which power and control were signalled in a disguised way.

‘Success’ in RPL in this context was dependent on four prior ‘affordances’: proximity to vertical discourse, being ‘schooled’ in reflection, a clear pedagogic identity as an educator and a well-developed learner identity. These affordances were socially distributed but not only along race and class lines.

An approach is proposed based on ‘knowing the borders and crossing the lines’. This involves theorising relationships between mainstream curricula and pedagogy, RPL curricula and pedagogy, and prior experiential knowledge. It concludes that such approaches might be useful in the broader field of widening participation to higher education.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABET	Adult Basic Education and Training
ANC	African National Congress
APEL	Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning
APL	Accreditation of Prior Learning
CAEL	Council for Adult and Experiential Learning
CATS	Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme
CNAA	Council for National Academic Awards
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
ETD	Education, Training and Development
ETDP	Education, Training and Development Practices
GNU	Government of National Unity
HE	Higher Education
HRD	Human Relations Development
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
JET	Joint Education Trust
LET	Learning from Experience Trust
NCHE	National Commission on Higher Education
NFE	Non Formal Education
NSOE	New Sociology of Education
NTB	National Training Board
NTSI	National Training Strategy Initiative
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
NUM	National Union of Mineworkers
NUMSA	National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
OD	Organisational Development
ORF	Official Recontextualising Field
PLA	Prior Learning Assessment
PLAR	Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition
PRF	Pedagogic Recontextualising Field
PWG	Programme Working Group
RDP	Reconstruction and Development Programme
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
RSA	Republic of South Africa
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
UDF	United Democratic Front
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America
WHEP	Workers' Higher Education Project
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This thesis explores the complexities associated with recognising prior experiential learning for access to a higher education context.

The Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) has become an established, bounded practice within education systems in many parts of the world: the United States of America (USA), the United Kingdom (UK), France, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Ireland and increasingly South Africa, Scandinavia, Germany, Austria, Belgium and some Eastern European and South American countries. Its origins are commonly traced to post-World War Two USA (Weil and McGill 1989; Michelson 1996a), when returning veterans wanted their skills recognised by universities. RPL is, however, not a totally new phenomenon in any of the above contexts. Rather, it is the formalisation and (re)naming of pre-existing practices concerning alternative access and admissions.

It has become a bounded practice under the changing socio-economic and cultural conditions of late modernity, referred to as globalisation. Edwards and Usher (1998: 164) view the latter as 'the paradoxical effects of universalising certain tendencies whilst at the same time giving rise to an assertion of the particular and the local'. They refer to this as 'the global-local nexus' (p.163), enhanced by information and communications technologies and subsequent space-time compression. It is claimed that instability and change are the only constants (Harrison 2000). Education has been influenced in profound ways by these conditions.

First, globalisation and attendant neo- or post-Fordist forms of economic organisation have established new relationships between the economy and education, with the latter based

increasingly on 'systemic efficiency' (Edwards and Usher 1998: 164). These new relationships have been successively and successfully forged, through waves of educational reforms and policy development.

Secondly, modes of knowledge production, circulation and communication have been recast. Knowledge structures have become increasingly permeable, resulting in new configurations of curricular authority, more permissive notions of curricular coherence and a widening range of curricular partnerships (Barnett 1992; Gibbons *et al.* 1994). Practice and theory have moved into closer proximity, especially in professional education (Eraut 1994; Schon 1983).

Thirdly, learning, assisted by technology, has become diffuse and unbounded. Dedicated learning institutions have been decentred as the locus of learning activity. Interpretations of learning have become extended, as exemplified in the concept of 'lifelong learning' in which boundaries around particular 'fields' of education and training have given way to open 'moorland' (Edwards 1997). As learning extends, the idea of transmission via traditional forms of pedagogy becomes problematic. The focus shifts from teachers to learners, with the latter seen as consumers of widely available educational opportunities. In short, it is claimed that new terms exist for the timing, location and utility of education. All of these changing conditions are incitements to practices such as RPL, which is invariably presented and implemented in an uncritical way.

This thesis opens with a critical review of the RPL literature. This reveals common characteristics of a wide ranging set of practices known collectively as RPL. Practices are aimed at adults (itself a wide descriptor). The key assumption is that adults have 'prior learning' which, subject to reflection, articulation and assessment, may be worthy of

recognition and accreditation within formal education and training systems or workplace contexts. Prior learning may have been acquired formally, non-formally or informally: the key factor is that it has not been accredited. The results of recognition can involve non-traditional access or the award of advanced standing within formal education and training, with the possibility of awarding in some cases a full qualification on the basis of RPL.

My review of the literature leads me to claim that there are silences, paradoxes and contradictions around understandings of knowledge, pedagogy, power and identity within RPL. It is argued that this is because practices are underpinned by experiential learning theory, which is similarly characterised by anti-foundationalism, anti-didacticism and claims to 'progressivism' based on a valuing of 'authentic', usually experiential learning. The review notes an absence of academic, empirical research at the micro-level of an RPL practice. The research foci for the thesis derive from the review, and are concerned with the ways in which knowledge(s), pedagogy, power and identity are understood and enacted in and around a particular RPL case.

South African higher education was selected as the research site. In 1993 I was awarded a British Council grant and a visiting lecturer post in an adult education department in a South African university. At that time, the country was preparing for the first democratic elections in 1994, and a flurry of pre-policy preparatory work, of which RPL formed a part, was underway. The concept was promoted by the labour movement, becoming part of ANC policy as a means of redress and reparation. The South African context is particularly challenging for a practice such as RPL because of vast historical differences in the quality of formal education, and opportunities more generally. Because RPL is such a central policy issue in educational reform, it has attracted the attention of a wide range of academics and social

theorists. Some academics think that ‘RPL is the site where most, if not all, the key questions about the new system will be posed’¹, thus becoming a new site for critical engagement with long-standing questions regarding knowledge and power in education.

My research is a case study, selected for its intrinsic and atypical qualities and generative interest value. An RPL practice was negotiated, designed and implemented in relation to a university post-graduate diploma for educators of adults. The formal entry requirements for the course were a degree or successful completion of a certificate within the same university department. The RPL practice recruited seven experienced adult educators who did not meet either of these admission criteria.

Features of the South African context formed an important historical backdrop to my case. These need to be explicated for a non-South African readership. In the pages that follow, I outline some of the features that influenced the various roleplayers in the RPL practice under consideration, particularly the university-based adult educators (myself included) and the RPL candidates. On a reflexive note, I write within the perspective of the democratic movement. I tell the stories of civil society, ‘progressive’ academics and trade unions. I tell education stories rather than training ones; social stories rather than economic ones. Thereafter, I outline the remaining chapters of the thesis.

Most South African adult education forms part of a long-standing tradition of oppositional education, seeking in various ways to oppose apartheid formal education, particularly education termed Bantu education. Educator work and university-based adult education

¹ Personal email communication from Associate Professor Morphet to myself, 24/11/00.

provision became politicised in the 1970s, against a backdrop of government control of black² education, and attempts to end ‘any assimilative or integrative tradition, whatever its scale’ and ‘any educational enterprise by church, cultural or political organisations that could be seen as “subversive”’ (Millar 1985: 113). Soweto, June 16, 1976 led to the broad radicalisation of students and represented a turning-point for educational struggle. The same period saw an escalation in militancy amongst black workers. During the seventies, a symbiotic relationship existed between ‘capital’ and state, manifested through a substantial number of large-scale joint ventures, and the creation of a nascent discourse of human resource development (HRD). Some large corporate bodies such as de Beers and Anglo-American mining houses took a more progressive stance by establishing independent trusts to fund and extend educational opportunities to black students. Local and international funds were diverted into a growing range of community-based, non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

An annual standing conference for teacher and adult educators was established in 1973. Kenton³ became a broadly intellectual neo-Marxist organisation, with liberal and radical variants, frequently in tension. Morphet (1985: 389) captures the tension in terms of a liberal tradition acting in a radical mode: ‘In the liberal university, with its carefully maintained insulation against direct threat, the liberal tradition had the social and political space to take up radical and militant attitudes’.

With regard to my own PhD research, it is clear that some of the academics who were involved in the RPL practice under consideration were long-standing members of the Kenton

² I use the term ‘black’ to denote those who were subjected to legislated discrimination, and ‘white’ for those who were not. Where appropriate to the discussion I have used the terms ‘African’, ‘coloured’ and ‘Indian’ to denote particular aspects of apartheid discrimination. I avoid capitalizing nouns associated with the racial definitions of the Population Registration Act, except where the noun has broader usage other than solely in South Africa or where it forms part of a quotation.

³ So named after the location of the first conference.

community. Others participated in political struggles more broadly, and were involved in various organisations - student, community-based organisations, non-governmental and/or the labour movement. Adult educators/practitioners who presented as RPL candidates had their experience shaped by the conditions of the time, either as recipients of Bantu education, as HRD practitioners in private sector organisations, as student activists, NGO workers, or trade unionists.

The 1980s are frequently dubbed the 'crisis years', 'struggle years', or the 'decade of resistance and repression'. It is the decade that had the most bearing on my own work in the country. P.W. Botha's attempts to grant constitutional concessions to coloured and Indian voters resulted in insurrection. Central to this was the formation of the United Democratic Front (UDF), dedicated to the ANC Freedom Charter, and characterised by a strong commitment to participatory, grassroots styles of decision making 'in which leaders are mandated by the communities they represent' (Sparks 1990: 401). Wolpe (1988) argues that it was students who prepared the ground for this movement and who subsequently (for a while) became main players within it. School boycotts intensified under the slogan 'Liberation first, education later'. The UDF grew organically and rapidly as an organised political movement that had upwards of two million activists including the burgeoning black trade union movement. The vision of 'People's education for people's power' developed. The impulse was clearly socialist and the concern was to develop education that did not reproduce capitalist relations, but instead developed programmes of general and political education based on the Freedom Charter and fundamental social change.

The state concentrated the power of its military and security forces, and in 1985 declared the first of two states of emergency. This amounted to a total onslaught on the operations of the

UDF which was seen as a revolutionary organisation. Various attempts at destabilisation were made. Militia units, recruiting from local vigilante groups were established. These units received quick training, were armed and set to work attacking the UDF in the townships. This move pitted black against black and exploited existing internal political rivalries to the full: the 'third force' in action. Press restrictions were enforced. Increasingly organisations were banned, gatherings prohibited, and more people rounded up: 'the police and military swept into the townships to detain thirty thousand people, including eight thousand children and three thousand women – more than in all the twenty-five years since Sharpeville' (Sparks 1990: 356).

The result of this was that the UDF rebellion, the implementation of people's power and people's education were slowed. However, the liberationists retained their broad legitimacy, and many more people became politicised. Importantly, the labour movement also grew stronger, especially after the formation of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) in 1985. Sparks (1990: 368) refers to this time as 'a violent equilibrium between a government that cannot be overthrown and a spirit of mass resistance that cannot be crushed'. By 1988, the activities of the UDF were severely restricted.

State-business relationships continued to flourish in the eighties. Some initiatives met with measured approval, largely on account of their non-racialism. As Hartshorne (1987: 128) notes, some private sector organisations became involved in political work aiming to influence education policy at the highest level in favour of 'fundamental educational reform'. The state-business alliance continued to have its share of ambiguities however. According to Schaffer (1984: 192) the 'altruism' of business was extremely dubious and in need of being set against the growing momentum of the disinvestment movement. Multi-nationals were especially

under pressure, from both South African workers and their head offices elsewhere (usually in the USA or the UK), to effect desegregation policies. Schaffer claims that the sorts of education offered through the state-business alliance undermined the working class movement at home and the anti-apartheid movement abroad.

The NGO sector grew in the eighties. Morphet (1987: 424) cites how many of the 'most gifted and innovative educational thinkers' abandoned the state system in favour of NGO projects.

He writes:

...the real and best work in curriculum design and programme innovation in South African education has, over the last decade, been done in the project field...from literacy and numeracy, through all school levels and on into tertiary and adult education, the educational contribution of projects in terms of ideas, models and forms of practice, is more than significant.

In addition to the quality of work, there was a development of strong alternative social and political networks: 'informal, flexible and highly efficient' ways of 'carrying forward the general process of social development'. This provided in Morphet's view the basis for the future 'reconstruction of education' (ibid.).

University-based provision for adult educators progressed relatively rapidly during this decade with the establishment of a range of non-formal programmes at undergraduate (certificate) and post-graduate (diploma) levels. These catered mainly to educator-activists involved in UDF community- and NGO-type activities, such as literacy programmes. In fact, adult education departments tended to operate in what Millar (in DEAL 1994: 67) terms a 'service role' in alliance with various sectors of the democratic movement. They made university resources

available in various ways and offered ‘safe spaces’ from which externally-funded projects could operate.

Some university education departments were involved in curriculum development projects associated with people’s education. The debates around knowledge within these arrangements are pertinent to my study. University and NGO educators tended to advance the case for compensatory education for adults that offered a modified general education, rather than a focus solely on education for upgrading that was work-related, and specific. The latter was seen as an instrumental ‘solution’ that forewent the ‘possibility of generating emancipatory or empowering insight’ (Deacon and Parker cited in Muller 2002: 137). This view sits uneasily with the prioritising of experience that is currently so prevalent in some adult and experiential learning theory (and indeed in RPL). It could be seen as a traditional view of knowledge in consort with a radical politics.

The sociology of education moved strongly to the fore within the Kenton community in the eighties. Muller (1996b) foregrounds the New Sociology of Education (NSOE) and texts such as Young (1971) and Karabel and Halsey (1977). He puts it thus:

...for a number of years in the 1980s, say between 1981 and 1986, the discourse of NSOE – the litany of reproduction, ideology, resistance – was what one might call counter-hegemonically hegemonic: it was the very language of educational opposition against apartheid education for the strategists in exile, for teacher trainers in the liberal universities, for activists in the community organisations, and for the students in the streets.

Muller (1996b: 180) proceeds to track the development of South African sociology of education, beginning with ‘the rediscovery of Marx via Althusser’ in the early part of the

decade. This move set Althusserians on a collision course with liberals, the latter being accused of 'naïve "possibilitarianism"' and an 'agent-centred view of change'. The Althusserian analysis proceeded thus: the (apartheid) state was the focus of critique; (Bantu) education was reproductive; (apartheid) ideology was to be struggled against, as was the (white) ruling class. With the advent of people's power, all of the above would be swept away and everything would be different. The discursive terrain thus set, offered little space for disagreement. Had there been such space, it might have been said that some Althusserians were committed to the same criteria and processes as capitalists, although with different content. As Muller (1996b: 181) points out, 'This was Marxism "of a special type" to be sure'. A further important influence was the intellectual French left of the 1950s and 1960s. Eventually expelled from the Communist Party, these activists (according to Sheridan 1980: 198) were involved in 'the creative *application of Marxism as an analytical tool* rather than its imposition as a body of doctrine, *a consistently revolutionary policy* rather than an *opportunistic dependence on short-term tactics*' [my emphases]. This certainly chimes with my understanding of the South African intelligentsia.

Tensions between 'radicals' and 'liberals' characterised Kenton conferences⁴. A particular radical critique linked liberals to an 'English' mode of theorising and to English educationists' lack of reflexive historical, social and ideological awareness. Crewe (1981: 62), in an acerbic commentary in support of the organic intellectual, argues that 'the English' question the assumptions and interests of others but not their own, and overlook historical materialism. She argues that, in their adoption of reproduction theory, liberals describe how reproduction takes place, but in ways that reinforce feelings of pessimism and powerlessness. What radicals or

⁴ Molobi (1987: 107), for example, writes about paternalistic liberals on the right and left liberals who remained aloof 'from the testing ground of mass activity'.

‘academic activists’ do, in her view, is to accept the force of social reproduction and ‘attempt to ask how the weight of hegemony can be breached from a low power position’.

On the other hand, liberals mounted critiques of the radicals. Graaff and Lawrence (1982) claimed that radicals were inflexible in their veneration of texts and their insistence that one must accept Marxist theory before being able to discuss it. The same writers argued that some radical positions were too closely wedded to economic determinism, structure and correspondence theory, and that empirical analysis was sacrificed to high theory and overarching explanations. They proposed that avoiding substantive analysis of human agency was anathema in South Africa. They also suggested that some radicals restate ‘fairly conventional liberal analysis in Marxist terminology’ and stretched class theory regardless of its fitness for this purpose (1982: 50).

A major impact on the academic and intellectual climate of the eighties was the call to action/activism made at the Kenton conference in 1987. It was clearly a revolutionary Marxist call for academics to locate themselves in the ‘social relations of production’ and to ‘look at the dynamics of the modern capitalist mode of production’ (Molobi 1987: 105): they would be able to, ‘as Marx put it, “cut themselves adrift” from the apron strings of the bourgeoisie to join the swelling ranks of the masses’ (p.108). Muller (1987: 427) reflects on the way the Kenton community grappled with this call, without resolution. He argues that the radical ‘view from below’ saw the academic defence of impartiality as ‘masking covert alignment with dominant interests’ (p.428), whereas an alternative view saw the ‘political demands for commitment as the first step along the road to totalitarianism’. Many activists, disciplined by the struggle, were unimpressed by academics’ anguishing, and came to have less respect for

university education as a result. A perhaps unsatisfactory position of 'committed non-alignment' came to prevail in many quarters.

The context of my research was infused with the particular interpretation of the sociology of education that predominated so powerfully during the eighties, including its internal contestations. There was a general theory of society at work – in this case a critical sociology of education based on forms of analytical and intellectual neo-Marxism with liberal and radical variants. This was an important backdrop to the RPL project. Academics in the department were involved to varying degrees in UDF activities, especially prior to taking up university posts. Some were specifically involved in building organisational capacity in the union movement. Students in the department, including the RPL candidates, arrived bearing the scars and accolades of the decade. RPL candidates and academics alike had family members and friends who had been detained and, in more than one case, murdered. The drift of colleagues, friends and family into exile during this decade also left its mark. Several candidates came into RPL with a suspicion of academia in relation to the non-alignment issue outlined above. Activists were learning alongside non-activists; UDF people alongside trade unionists alongside private-sector educators.

The release of political prisoners and the *de facto* unbanning of the ANC in 1990 marked the beginning of a long period of negotiations over the organisation of a future government and the repeal of discriminatory laws. In 1992-3, F.W. De Klerk negotiated a political settlement with the forces of liberation, which led to the first democratic elections in 1994, the establishment of a Government of National Unity (GNU) headed by the ANC, and, in 1996 the adoption of a constitution. The years before the election were characterised by intense (pre-) policy formulation and planning across the various spheres of public life, including

education. The people-state antagonism collapsed. As Muller (1996b: 182-3) puts it, '[t]he state was now becoming "our" state...it was soon *de rigueur* to be involved in reconstructive work'.

These pre-policy years were characterised by what Millar and Xulu (1996: 4) describe as 'conditions of dramatic change', at two levels: 'the local context of transformed post-Apartheid political and economic conditions and, at an international level, transformed conditions of knowledge production and communication'. Add to this two further conditions of change: first, the weakening of Marxism as a theory and guide to action, and secondly the shift from a 'discourse of ends' to a 'discourse of means' or reconstruction, marking the end of several decades of a particular kind of critique in educational and political circles.

There followed a wide range of early GNU legislation in which RPL formed part. It was the era of four-way stakeholder participation, by employers, trade unions, the state and providers of education and training: 'integration' was the vogue word. The then Ministry of Manpower invited COSATU to join the National Training Board (NTB) and its National Training Strategy Initiative (NTSI). A range of working groups was subsequently established. I was a member of working group nine, on assessment and RPL in the context of the developing National Qualifications Framework (NQF). The two ministries (Education and Labour) moved cautiously towards each other through inter-ministerial working groups and the drafting of joint legislation. The White Paper on Education and Training (RSA 1995a) was one such piece of legislation, in which RPL was signalled as a redress mechanism: 'It will open doors of opportunity for people whose academic or career paths have been needlessly blocked because their prior knowledge (acquired informally or by work experience) has not been assessed and certified, or because their qualifications have not been recognised...' (RSA 1995a: 15).

The NQF which was under discussion from the early nineties (for example, ANC/COSATU 1993)⁵, is a super-ordinate classification system within whose logic all qualifications are required to operate. It requires the development and registration of standards and qualifications and their ongoing quality assurance. It has been a highly significant development in the South African context, not least because of the innocence, enthusiasm and urgency with which it has been embraced, and also because of the way in which its proponents envisage a radical integration and inclusiveness, embracing the university sector along with the rest of education. The NQF has been seen as embodying the antithesis of all that was wrong with apartheid education. It offers a new, inclusive, outcomes-based, competence-orientated system to replace everything that is old, discriminatory and inefficient. There has been a massive conflation of technical procedures and radical principles. 'Critical cross-field outcomes' are a case in point. These are little more than key or generic skills but, in the South African context, they have assumed the status of 'a commitment to a more radical pedagogy that actively promotes lifelong learning skills, and increasingly recognises the value of knowledge which is produced in non-formal and non-conventional ways' (Ralphs 2001: 10). There has been some critique of the vocational overtones of the NQF, but in the main such concerns have been swamped by the sheer doctrinaire weight of the discourse linking the NQF to the new dispensation and its social goals.

In many quarters, higher education tried to maintain a distance from the NQF (and from RPL). In 1995, a National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) was established, to outline a policy and legislative framework for higher education. In its final report (NCHE 1996) the commission gave cautious support to the NQF and to the principle of integrating education

⁵ Drawing from similar models around the world, especially the Australian lifelong learning framework.

and training. However, it did not endorse unit standard methodology, arguing instead for higher education qualifications to be 'aligned' to the NQF. With regard to access, the NCHE report focused attention on black school leavers and the likelihood that black schooling could not, even in the medium term, be relied upon to produce enough matriculants of higher education standard. In order to increase participation, it was recommended that higher education institutions extend their academic development programmes and review (and extend) the length of their qualifications. The report signalled RPL as requiring further 'attention' (NCHE 1996: 137).

The nineties were *the* decade of RPL, particularly in terms of grappling with the concept. The main body concerned with research and advocacy was the Joint Education Trust (JET), with technical assistance from the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) in the USA. The first initiative was the Workers' Higher Education Project (WHEP), coordinated by JET, and funded by the Ford Foundation and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. The aim of WHEP was to expand access to higher education through the development of RPL 'demonstration models' (JET 1998) for working adults who had been disadvantaged by apartheid. The pilot projects were in engineering, management, rural development/agriculture and teacher education. A number of other developments followed: JET became involved in assessor training within the NQF; guidelines were developed for higher education institutions concerned to develop RPL and responsiveness to adults; the first South African international conference on RPL was held in October 2000; and a national policy on RPL was developed for the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). JET was not the only roleplayer in the RPL field in the nineties, however. Trade unions developed initiatives, and the Human Sciences Research Council funded a three-year research and development project (which I coordinated).

Various positions began to emerge in relation to RPL, and persisted into the current decade. According to Ralphs (2001: 13-14), 'there are three discernible impulses putting pressure on the system to change its RPL policy and practices'. His 'radical impulse' requires a critical reassessment of mainstream curricula and a commitment to subjugated knowledge - for example, 'African or indigenous knowledge, workers' knowledge and the knowledge of those who were "excluded" in the past'. His 'neo-liberal impulse' locates RPL as an uncritical tool of the global economy. His 'neo-conservative impulse' is to be found in traditional liberal academia with its commitment to foundational knowledge and 'the basics', and therefore, regarded as resistant to RPL on epistemological grounds. JET aligned to the radical model. These classifications and conceptualisations of RPL are at odds with the views of academic sociologists of education with their analytical neo-Marxism, which, according to Ralphs, would be located in the neo-conservative camp. In some ways therefore, it seems as if RPL protagonists and university educators misunderstood and continue to misunderstand each other.

University-based provision for adult educators changed shape in the nineties. The early part of the decade saw a downturn in the number of adult educator students because of a dramatic reduction in the number of NGOs⁶. The five universities that had departments or centres of adult and continuing education came together in 1992 as the DEAL Trust, and began to strategise around future inter-university cooperative work. It was recognised that there was a need to address the education and training needs of educators in workplaces and technical colleges while maintaining the traditional focus on community-based practitioners. The project put forward three possible models of qualification structure for adult educators and

⁶ Donor funding was channelled into government structures, leaving NGOs without funds.

trainers. These were predicated on progression, articulation and RPL, locating them 'firmly within the traditional university discourse' (DEAL 1994: 55).

A far bigger project involving the education and training of educators and trainers began in 1995. The Education, Training and Development Practices (ETDP) project originated in the work of the NTB, and was concerned with the development of nationally recognised standards for educators and trainers, a negotiated model in terms of progression pathways, sets of unit standards and qualifications, accepted by the target groups, for developing and recognizing quality ETD practices, particularly within the National Qualifications Framework (see NTB 1997). The project was underpinned by the value system of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) and had RPL as one of its twelve principles. As the name suggests, integration remained a key principle. Adult educators would become ETD practitioners along with all other educators and trainers, with 'learning' as the integrative concept. Education (E) was conceptualised as taking place in the formal education sector, comprising schools, technical colleges, universities and industry training boards. Training (T) included public and private sector training involving employers, government, HRD and in-house training. Development (D) referred to social development work of the broadest kind in cultural organisations, political organisations, unions and some NGOs.

As the decade progressed financial resources for adult education were not forthcoming. The field lost its envisaged status. As the DEAL Trust report (DEAL 1994: 22) notes, participants in policy development processes 'have operated within the terms provided by a hard-won and remarkable political space for fresh and idealistic system construction. Problems of implementation had been deferred...the complexity of the relation between policy and implementation is becoming apparent'.

In terms of my PhD research, all of the academics who were involved in the RPL practice concerned were also involved in some form of policy development or policy analysis work, including the ETDP project. It has to be said that for many this brought increasing scepticism as the decade progressed. However, powerful discourses of the eighties continued to work their way through the departmental context of my research. My PhD research is thus located at a particular historical conjuncture, and at the interface of departmental discourses, changes in the field of university-based adult education and adult education generally, national policy and RPL discourses. These were the ‘stories’ of which the RPL project was a part. I now return to the outline of my thesis.

Chapter three of my thesis outlines a philosophical framework for the research. I argue for, and adopt, a hybrid philosophical position – part social constructionist, part structuralist and part poststructuralist.

My research draws theoretical resources from beyond experiential learning. In chapter four, I critically review conceptual resources from the sociology of education (the work of Bernstein) and from continental philosophy (the work of Foucault). The conceptual framework thus derived does not attempt a synthesis of the work of these two very different theorists. Rather, it aims to use both to create a broad interpretive zone. Foucault’s work facilitates a particular focus on a power and identity in ways that are nuanced and complex. Through the lens of pedagogy, Bernstein offers a powerful set of concepts for focusing on knowledge and curriculum.

Chapter five presents my research design. It aims to be more than a statement of research methods and instruments – selected, designed and applied. It offers a discussion of these matters in relation to my philosophical position and research questions. I address five overlapping features of the internal structuring of the research: the unit(s) of analysis for the research (the case study); the instruments and methods of data collection; the presentation of the data; the modes of, and procedures for, data analysis and interpretation and the presentation of the data analysis and interpretation.

Chapters six and seven bring theoretical resources into dialogue with documentary and interview data, first, inductively (through theme analysis), and then abductively, through theory-driven interpretation. This is done in two stages (1) the negotiation and initial design of RPL and (2) curriculum design and the implementation of RPL.

The last chapter, chapter eight, links interpretations and claims into a concluding discussion of my research questions. I address implications for RPL practice and research. The end-pieces reflect on the research process as a whole.

Finally, I offer a note about evaluating the quality of research, since I consider this to be a responsibility to myself, as well as to other researchers, to those researched and to the academic community as a whole. Validity and reliability are interpreted differently in different philosophical and paradigmatic positions. This case study strives to meet Hammersley's validity criteria (cited in Scott 2000: 4). These are plausibility (whether the evidential claims are plausible to the reader); coherence (whether evidence and argument logically cohere in the relationship presented between data and claims); intentionality (whether a study is credible in terms of its stated intentions); and relevance (whether the research findings are relevant to

issues of legitimate public concern). Reliability is a not a straightforward concept outside positivist research, yet is difficult to dispense with altogether. I have chosen to ‘read’ it in a constructionist way, as dependability. I draw attention to these criteria at various points.

Following Cryer (1996: 146-55), I hope that this study is original in its exploration of a practice that is very scantily explored (originality in exploring the unknown), and that it offers a new (and ‘troubling’) perspective on an established educational practice (originality in outcomes). I also hope that it has resonances within the broader field of ‘widening participation’ in higher education.

CHAPTER TWO: SUBJECT REVIEW

A literature of silences, paradoxes and contradictions

In this chapter I review literature pertinent to RPL and argue for and position my research questions and study in relation to that. I focus on:

- literature that is theory-based or research-based. I reargue (but do not totally exclude) policy literature and practitioner and learner guides and manuals for RPL;
- literature pertaining to RPL at higher education level; although practices at further education level are referred to for illustration and comparison;
- literature in English pertaining predominantly to English-speaking countries;
- literature written between 1980 and 2003, although earlier literature is referred to where it represents a significant debate or theme in the development of RPL.

I conceptualise the review process as progressive focusing. This involves survey, synthesis and critical evaluation of the literature in terms of content and methodologies. Moving from survey to synthesis involves categorising the content of the literature and linking issues.

Moving from synthesis to critical analysis and evaluation shifts the review into a formative mode that progressively points in the direction of my own research foci. The chapter therefore has summative and formative dimensions – being a picture of the state of the art in the RPL field, and revealing gaps and questions in relation to that.

I have been involved in, and troubled by, RPL for more than a decade. Much literature has been gathered during that time based on my being located in the field, attending conferences, and indeed contributing to the literature myself. For the purposes of the PhD, I systematically followed up bibliographic references in that literature and undertook literature searches using databases (ERIC, worldcat, ovid and ebsco). I also consulted an international RPL-specific bibliographic database ('annotated bibliography for PLAR'⁷) which is hosted by the Ontario Institute for Studies of Education of the University of Toronto, Canada⁸.

My involvement with RPL began in the mid- to late 1980s when the local education authority I was working for in the United Kingdom (UK) hosted a research and development project in RPL. At that time I had responsibility for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision in the post-school sector, and saw the potential of RPL to value the knowledge and skills of 'ESOL students', in ways that went beyond a sole focus on their English language requirements.

These ideas developed during my time in South Africa. My thinking about RPL moved slowly from a 'confirmatory' practitioner orientation to a more 'disconfirmatory' critical stance. Increasing scepticism is mirrored in broader RPL literature to which (I would like to think) my own research and writing has contributed (Harris 1999a; Harris 2000). However, much literature retains an unproblematised stance towards the practice – a phenomenon I explore in this review. I need to point out that the review emphasises critical writings in a way that perhaps makes them appear to be dominant numerically and in terms of influence. This is not the case. There are two reasons for my emphasis. First, I found it difficult to focus at length on

⁷ Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition.

⁸ <http://fcis.oise.utoronto.ca/~plar/database/intro.html>.

‘absences’ in the literature, although I have attempted to do so as far as possible. Secondly, my own research agenda has evolved through consideration of ‘disconfirmatory’ critical literature.

The first part of the review is concerned with the RPL literature that presents ‘accepted’ theory and practice. The second part brings to the surface silences, paradoxes and contradictions in the literature. The third and final section is concerned with defining initial contours and parameters for my study.

Part One: Accepted theory and practice

The theorisation of RPL

Commonly accepted theorisation of RPL is via adult and experiential learning theory. Kolb’s (1984) ‘experiential learning cycle’ is the linchpin. His cycle has four stages. The first is ‘concrete experience’ or ‘direct encounter’ (Kolb 1984; Weil and McGill 1989). For many interpreters of, or commentators on, Kolb this stage is pre-rational. The second stage is ‘observation and reflection’. This is the conscious time when individuals focus on their experience and give it meaning (usually from within existing sets of perspectives and values). The third stage is ‘generalization and abstract conceptualisation’, whereby the fruits of reflection are ordered into symbolic representations. According to Fenwick (2001: 10), this is where the learner asks questions such as: ‘What principle seems to be operating here?’ The fourth stage is ‘active experimentation’, or the empirical testing of ideas generated at the previous stage.

It is presumed possible for a learner to enter the cycle at any stage, and although the general direction of movement remains the same, there is interaction between the four quadrants.

However, Kolb's central tenet remains constant in all variants: learning cannot happen without the cognitive and psychological process of internal, mental conceptualisation. Kolb has a rationalist and mentalist notion of learning and reflection.

The learning cycle shares principles inherent in adult learning theory, particularly the theory generated by Knowles. Knowles's (1980) work also took as its starting point experience as a resource for learning. As Fraser (1995: 139) puts it, for Knowles, 'adults are what they have done'. Experience, then, is one of Knowles's five principles of 'andragogy' or adult learning theory in which he argues for a learner-centred educational process, with reflection as central.

Both Knowles's work and Kolb's have roots in constructivism – a highly complex field of learning theory which seems to be constantly in need of clarification (see for example Fenwick 2001; Harris 1999b; Moll 2002; Sfard 1998). Moll (2002: 8) defines it as 'the broad set of psychological theories that seek to model the developmental structures of cognition'. All constructivists share the tenet that 'a learner is believed to construct, through reflection, a personal understanding of relevant structures of meaning derived from his or her own action in the world' (Fenwick 2001: 10).

The work of Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky are most commonly associated with constructivism. Piaget (in Moll 2002: 14) is clear that learning is about 'construction on the part of the subject'. Vygotsky's work is on the social side of constructivism. His 'social development theory' posits that learning happens first in relation to others and that only later

is it internalised individually. Put another way, individual consciousness is built from outside through social relations (this is his main point of departure from Piaget).

There are differences between Kolb and Knowles on the one hand, and Piaget and Vygotsky on the other. For Piaget and Vygotsky there is a notion of *organised* pedagogic activities. Vygotsky's position in this regard is best illustrated by his theory of the zone of proximal development (ZPD). The ZPD refers to the gap between what an individual can achieve unaided and what s/he can achieve with the help of an expert/teacher. Learning then requires an active teacher as well as an active learner. Likewise, for Piaget, the teacher is the organizer of learning. This is less the case in the type of constructivism advanced by Knowles and Kolb and in adult and experiential learning theory more generally, where the identity of teacher is relegated to 'facilitator' and the identity of student is reworked as the independent and self-directed learner. In fact, constructivists such as Piaget and Vygotsky are rarely cited in adult and experiential learning theory's version of constructivism⁹. Instead, Dewey's pragmatism is quoted as the origin of constructivist learning theory. The Deweyan tradition emphasises the ways people learn how to construct, and deconstruct, their own experiences and meanings and to integrate theory and practice as a basis for democratic social action. I would argue that for many adult and experiential educators (and consequently for RPL), constructivism is understood in a very particular way, characterised by anti-didacticism and a concomitant emphasis on what Welton (1986) calls 'an "adult characteristics" episteme' of 'authentic' learning from experience. This is a more humanistic and psychological framework than that of either Piaget or Vygotsky.

⁹ My own work is an exception. In Harris 1997c I make a case for the development of an RPL process based on Vygotsky's notion of ZPD, and on collaborative learning through 'expert' and 'novice' activities.

In practice it has proved difficult to draw boundaries around ‘authentic’ (experiential) and ‘non-authentic’ (presumably formal) learning, at the level of both qualitative difference and methodology. In the case of the former, Millar (1996: 2) argues that the commitment to authentic learning constructs the experiential learning movement as a ‘quest and vision sharply contrasted with the false, mediocre or corrupt’. The quest, he claims, requires a ‘negative pole’ which is ‘learning which is narrow, intellectual, subject-bound and has somehow come adrift from feeling or practice’. Thus, we see a process of forced dichotomization at work. Fenwick (2001) argues that the methodological distinction is difficult to hold because experiential learning is just as much a feature of formal education as in discussion, reading, structured reflection, etc.

Despite (or perhaps because of) the breadth of experiential learning, various attempts at definition and classification have been made. The most well-known of these is Weil and McGill’s (1989) four villages. *Village one* is the recognition of prior learning with a focus on boosting adults’ strengths, self-esteem and status through recognizing their knowledge and all they have learned throughout their lives: a largely humanist, psychological and ‘progressive’ underpinning. *Village two* stresses processes of learning and is concerned with the development of teaching/learning methods in formal education that value and use adults’ experience. This village is concerned with the holistic development of the individual alongside contextual/ institutional change. It therefore embodies humanistic and ‘progressive’ dimensions. *Village three* is about social change and transformation and with the development of critical consciousness: a radical position. *Village four* is about personal experience as the basis for growth and the development of self-awareness: a psychotherapeutic agenda. In mapping the villages, Weil and McGill are at pains to point out that they share a common citizenship and that, as Millar (1996: 1) puts it, the villages have ‘open borders – there is

commerce among them – and there are goods and practices in common’. The main goods in common are anti-didacticism and anti-foundationalism - that is, a counter-privileging of experiential and personal knowledge contributions over canonical texts.

Other theorists have developed Kolb’s original work and taken it in different directions (often aligned to one or other village). David Boud has perhaps been the most prolific in this regard. In Boud *et al.* (1985: 13), it is argued that Kolb does not ‘discuss the nature of his stage of observation and reflection in much detail’. A consideration of the elements of *reflection* thus becomes the focus for the book. The authors return to Dewey and to the idea of reflective activity as involving the ‘perception of relationships, and connections between parts of an experience’ (p.12), and an attempt on the part of the learner to re-establish certainty over uncertainty. They critique Dewey’s approach as overly rational and cognitive and argue for a more detailed and affective conceptualisation of reflection. They insert two psychotherapeutic stages: first, ‘returning to the experience’ and paying particular attention to its contextual dimensions. Secondly, ‘attending to feelings’ through emotional ‘discharge’, after which, the writers claim, experience can be re-evaluated and reintegrated (Kolb’s generalization and abstract conceptualisation stage). Thereafter, the new insights can be reality tested as in Kolb’s active experimentation.

Boud (1990) turns his attention to the contextual dimension of *experience*. In order to reflect more successfully and get the most out of their experience, learners and teachers need to address the inter-relationships between a learner’s personal foundations for learning, learning intent (what is driving the learning process and why) and learning milieu (covering physical environment, culture, race, gender and class issues). In this way, experience can be seen as a ‘continuing, complex series of interactions between the learner and the learning milieu, unified

by reflective processes which assimilate and work with the learning potential of the environment, and can move the learner to take appropriate action within the experience' (Boud 1990: 66).

In order to further enhance the efficacy of experience-based learning, Boud argues for a shift from reflection *after* experience to reflection *during* experience (reflection-in-action). He advances two techniques to achieve this: 'noticing' and 'intervening' (p.61). The former is 'directed to both the interior and exterior worlds'. It involves attending to thoughts and feelings as they are being thought and felt, whilst at the same time focusing on the nature of the event (such matters as forms of interaction, language use, actions, emotional climate). Intervening is about 'action taken by the learner within the learning situation' (p.73). The impetus for invention may be a conscious result of noticing, or a 'partially formulated intent' (p.73). The general idea is to practice in order to overcome limitations on noticing and intervening which may be located in the learner's personal history or foundation of experience. Thus, Boud's work is designed to help individuals to become more active, individually constructivist learners.

In Boud *et al.* (1993), the writers challenge earlier notions that experience is pre-rational. Instead, they argue that it 'has within it judgment, thought and connectedness with other experience – it is not isolated sensing...it implies consciousness...it always comes with meaning' (p.6). Overarching this, they develop five broad propositions about learning from experience which span psychological, constructivist, social and psychotherapeutic dimensions. These are: 'Experience is the foundation of, and the stimulus for, learning'; 'Learners actively construct their experience'; 'Learning is a holistic process'; 'Learning is socially and culturally constructed' and 'Learning is influenced by the socio-emotional context in which it

occurs' (p.8-14). This, in my view, broadens the definition of learning from experience but does not sharpen its analytical powers.

The practice of RPL

I focus on practices in the USA (as arguably the first country where RPL was developed), the UK and South Africa (as pertinent to my study).

Although the rubric of Kolb's experiential learning has been assiduously pursued, there are a wide range of different emphases, perspectives and concerns within RPL practices. Cleary *et al.*'s (2001) study of Scotland is illustrative. They found RPL practices varying in length from two weeks to nine months. There were variations in the amount of support available to candidates going through an RPL process. They found a mix of RPL 'curricula'. In some cases prior learning was the sole curriculum. In others, the RPL process was framed by issues or themes. Moreover, the types of task to support movement through the stages of the experiential learning cycle varied immensely.

In the wider literature, other differing emphases are noticeable. Sometimes the processes of reflection and reflective commentary are stressed (see for example Butterworth 1992). In other cases, individual 'stock-taking' (Storan 1988: 4) or undertaking an 'inventory' of learning from experience is foregrounded (Mandell and Michelson 1990: v¹⁰). Other writers stress the importance of the self-assessment aspects of RPL in terms of confidence building. Fehnel (1994: 26), for example, argues that, 'the recognition of prior learning has meant a very powerful affirmation of the individual, which frequently results in a new sense of self-

¹⁰ Critical academic RPL commentators and theorists from the USA. Michelson has also worked in South Africa.

confidence and empowerment'. For other writers and commentators, it is the social justice aspects that are most important. This is clearly evidenced in Evans's large body of work. For example, he writes about RPL as self-evidently 'natural' and 'humane' arguing that it encourages educational institutions to 'take a concerned humane view of men and women who wish to study at the formal academic level and who do not have the kind of educational record that ensures eligibility' (Evans 1993: 14). Wailey and Simpson (1998: 4) stress the potential of RPL to drive organisational change. They offer an institution-wide conceptualisation of RPL, linking it to other functions such as academic development, career guidance, and mainstream assessment practices in order to enhance 'coherence' for all adult learners. Yet other writers focus on the technical and administrative aspects of recognizing prior learning, such as 'the rigorous application of quality assurance procedures' (Evans 1992: 101-2), guidelines for the award of 'credit' (Whittaker 1989), and the development of credit systems, outcomes and generic entry criteria.

A number of writers draw attention to shifts in RPL practices. Butterworth (1992) is perhaps the best example. She conceptualises two 'ideal type' models of RPL – developmental and credit-exchange – pointing to their different epistemological underpinnings and different experiences for the candidate. Her developmental model is firmly predicated on Kolb. The candidate is actively involved in evaluating his or her prior learning; reflection is central; and learning is seen as a process. Portfolio development is a central feature of her developmental RPL. The credit-exchange model coincided with national vocational qualifications in the UK. In this model, learning and reflection are reargrounded in favour of a candidate providing evidence of performance and achievement. Several commentators (Challis 1993; Harris 1997a; Wailey and Simpson 1998) argue that this model displaces the original conceptions of learner-centred activity as derived from experiential learning theory.

What the above necessarily truncated account of experiential learning theory and practice shows is that it is both a philosophy and a method. It embodies particular conceptions of learning, knowledge, learner and educator, framed by particular interpretations of constructivism. It has already been argued that educator commitment to one or other aspect of experiential learning has acquired the status of a ‘social movement’, one that sees itself as ‘progressive’ - even ‘radical’ - in its anti-foundationalism, anti-didacticism and commitment to the ‘democratisation’ of the culture and methodologies of formal education institutions. It is to this trio of allegiances that I now turn – that is, anti-foundationalism, anti-didacticism and ‘progressivism’.

Part Two: Silences, paradoxes and contradictions in the RPL literature

In order to probe the anti-foundationalism/anti-canonism of experiential theory and practice, I address silences, paradoxes and contradictions around *knowledge* in the RPL literature. I use the term (prior experiential) knowledge rather than (prior) learning or (prior) experience. I reserve the term ‘learning’ for process, for activities that generate knowledge. In order to probe the anti-didacticism of experiential learning theory and practice, I address silences, paradoxes and contradictions around *pedagogy* in the RPL literature. In order to probe the ‘progressivism’ of experiential learning theory and practice, I address silences, paradoxes and contradictions around *power*.

Knowledge in the literature

The literature is replete with unqualified assertions that RPL challenges formal definitions and ownership of knowledge. Yet, paradoxically, experiential learning and RPL theorists are extremely cautious about entering the knowledge domain and seldom discuss disciplinary or formal knowledge. Although discussion of knowledge is conspicuous by its absence in the RPL literature, it cannot be silenced, making oblique entrances into the literature from time to time, as the following sections outline.

Knowledge boundaries and knowledge transfer

One position on knowledge is that there are *no differences* between various forms - such as between Heron's notions of experiential (practical and personal) knowledge and propositional knowledge (in Burnard 1988). An example of this is Evans and Turner (1993: 17), who claim, 'a growing acceptance of the principle that learning gained as a result of experience or elsewhere can be assessed and indeed should be assessed for academic purposes'. Mandell and Michelson (1990: 3) argue that adults enter higher education with 'rich clusters of college-level knowledge and skill gained from myriad sources'. Butterworth (1992: 40) asserts that RPL candidates 'have already acquired some of the skills, knowledge and understanding which a qualifying institution offers on a specific course'.

A further position on knowledge is a 'soft boundary' approach¹¹, whereby any distinctions that might exist are consciously or unconsciously taken to be readily amenable to 'transfer' between contexts. The basic argument is one of *similarity and continuity* between forms of

¹¹ See Muller 2002 and Young 2002 for writings about hard and soft knowledge boundaries.

knowledge. Mandell and Michelson (1990: 147) argue that there is a 'natural transition between previous experiential learning and new academic modes of thought'¹², and between 'academic and nonacademic cultures of knowledge' (Michelson 1998a: 42).

There are further ambiguities in the literature. For example, as well as arguing for 'no difference' and for 'similarity and continuity', Michelson (1998b) argues that RPL is a site where different 'cultures of knowledge' meet, each with a different historically accorded authority. She positions RPL as a radical vehicle for recognizing and therefore equalising epistemologically unequal cultures of authority, based on *difference*.

Writing from a labour educator perspective, Spencer *et al.* (2000: 3) argue in a similar way that knowledges can be different on account of history, struggle and ideology. Where they differ from Michelson, is that they do not recommend recognizing this in the formal context via RPL:

Most experiential learning is specific, related to a particular situation or problem adults are faced with, and does not easily translate into the kind of learning associated with academic courses...experiential learning is not inferior to formal learning, it is different; there are times when it closely resembles academic learning but there are many occasions when it does not (Spencer *et al.* 2000: 3).

RPL literature from South Africa tends to take a 'hard boundary' approach to knowledge. Breier (1996) argues that learning in an informal context will produce different knowledge from that in a formal context. Osman *et al.* (2000: 12) write about an RPL pilot which had as one of its research questions an assumption of knowledge difference, in: 'How do experiential

¹² The use of the term 'new' suggests distinctions.

and academic learning articulate with each other?’ Ralphs and Motala (2000) view both soft and hard boundary proponents from a critical distance. With regard to the former they argue that there is little clarity in higher education as to what constitutes academic knowledge, and that propositional knowledge can relate both to academic learning and to particular fields of practice and experience. From a hard boundary perspective they present an alternative argument, that it cannot be assumed that propositional knowledge is achieved through experiential learning, and that perhaps ‘[l]ife experience does not necessarily develop cognitive skills except under specific conditions’ (p.5).

In my own work (Harris 1999a; Harris 2000) I draw attention to relationships between different forms of knowledge context by context, arguing that in some educational sites academic knowledge and experiential knowledge may be closer than in others. This is similar to Fraser (1995) who argues that RPL is based on an unproblematised notion of learning transfer without questioning what knowledge is likely to transfer in the most efficacious way. Trowler (1996), in a paper outlining ambiguities in RPL practice and literature, also makes the point that practitioners and theorists need to know more about the easy notion of knowledge transfer within RPL.

The assumption in the main body of RPL literature is that *even if* there are distinctions and differences between forms of knowledge these can be overcome because boundaries are soft and knowledge can transfer unproblematically between contexts. The paradox is that if there is no distinction to be made between prior learning and formal knowledge, then transfer is not necessary, as the latter implies change and movement. However, if there *are* distinctions between forms of knowledge then transfer (as change and movement) *is* an appropriate term.

But then, if prior learning has to undergo change in order to be recognised, RPL is a less appropriate term.

Knowledge ‘matching’

The concept of ‘matching’ throws more light (obliquely) onto the knowledge issue. As RPL has become more credential-focused, greater attention has been paid to this phenomenon. Candidates link the learning outcomes of their prior learning with external requirements emanating from standards, curricula outcomes, or from more tacit and embedded understandings.

There is a continuum of views about what matching means. Most of the literature reveals tacit understandings of matching as ‘equivalence’ (of prior experiential knowledge and external requirements) which implies identity or similarity. Luedekke (1997: 217), in a final report on a three-year research project in Canada (exploring the viability of RPL), sees prior learning as needing to be ‘consistent’ with the institution’s offerings. For Starr-Glass (2002: 3) the process of what he calls finding ‘varying degrees of similarity’ is a form of ‘concurrent validity’ which ‘tends to make the practice of APL an exercise in mapping the familiar’.

At the other end of the ‘matching’ continuum are approaches that advocate for prior learning to be assessed for its difference from external requirements. These tend to be aspirational rather than actual. Brennan and Williams (1998: 34) raise a challenge to define more creatively ‘boundaries or thresholds to mark the limits of acceptable diversity’ in terms of the assessment of prior experiential knowledge. Evans and Turner (1993: 28), in contradiction to

most of their other writing, put forward the idea that something called ‘mature intellectual development’ should be credit-worthy.

Michelson (1998a: 43) is critical of the fact that prior experiential knowledge has to ‘have some relationship to a branch of enquiry that exists somewhere in the academy’. Arguing from a feminist postmodernist perspective, she makes the case for all knowledge to be seen as social product and as partial. This, she argues, extends an invitation to RPL to recognise divergent yet complementary knowledge from ‘epistemologically unsanctioned lives’ (Michelson 1996b: 649).

In my view, an underlying theme in most of the RPL literature is not so much ‘matching’, but the spectre of ‘lack of fit’. Some of the less orthodox RPL writers engage with this, particularly those involved with overviews of RPL. Wheelahan *et al.* (2003: 12-13), writing in the Australian context, make the point that ‘personal learning is not neatly packaged for comparison with academic course requirements’. Cleary *et al.* (2002: 13) dare to suggest that, ‘there may be difficulties in accommodating informal learning and knowledge into institutional systems and structures associated with more traditional forms of knowledge and learning’. In a paper reflecting on an RPL pilot in South Africa, Osman *et al.* (2000: 10) offer some straight talking about lack of fit, observing that candidates’ ‘reflective essays often showed gaps in their conceptual knowledge and academic skills’. Also in the South African context, Lugg *et al.* (1997: 7), in a critical evaluation of RPL pilots in parastatal employment contexts, find that there was a distinct lack of fit ‘between workers’ knowledge and the standards against which they were being assessed’.

A different slant is taken by Starr-Glass (2002: 221). He draws on anthropology and Levi-Strauss's notion of 'totemism', which stresses different orders and patterns of logic, and presents the possibility of an RPL practice premised on 'predictive validity'. This would focus on potential and 'a much broader correlation between the ways in which knowledge is acquired, processed and utilised by those who prove, in the long term, to be successful or well-adapted in academic or vocational terms' (p.223). What is implied here is the need for retrospective research on successful students, and the use of those as measures for assessing RPL candidates.

Curriculum issues

The literature suggests that RPL is much more common, and indeed successful, at a postgraduate, post-experience level (Taylor 1996; Cleary *et al.* 2001; Lahiff 1998; Butterworth *et al.* 1993)¹³. Various reasons for this are advanced.

One reason is that the curricular focus on specialist knowledge and skills at this level is close to contextualized learning from experience. A related reason is that postgraduate professional programmes foreground practice as the focus of theoretical work. Colyer and Hill (1998: 162-3), for example, describe courses in health care as giving, 'equal weight to increasing and refining the theoretical and value base of practice, the experience of practice in diverse settings and the opportunity to develop higher level cognitive skills of evaluation and reflective judgment'. Lahiff (1998: 122) sees this privileging of practice in knowledge terms, arguing that professional development courses tend to value both propositional and process

¹³ This is certainly the case in the UK.

knowledge, and that assessors on such courses are particularly ‘sensitive to practitioners’ alternative means of expressing useful knowledge’.

A third related reason is that postgraduate professional programmes are frequently designed using principles of reflective practitioner and reflection-in-action. An example is the argument put forward by Butterworth *et al.* (1993: 2) for choosing to design an RPL process around a particular diploma, because course materials ‘offer the model of the reflective practitioner and suggest self-review and analysis of learning outcomes as strategies to achieve this’.

At undergraduate level, the literature suggests much more caution about RPL (Trowler 1996; Peters 2000; Breier and Burgess 2003). This is further borne out by the Cleary *et al.* (2002: 21) study: ‘to date, there appears to have been difficulties in accommodating experiential learning into more formal and traditional types of learning, particularly at levels other than postgraduate study’. However, there is little exploration as to why this might be the case. If reasons are advanced, they usually centre on the recalcitrance of ‘traditional’ academics, rather than on the knowledge structures.

Some of the RPL literature attempts to engage RPL practitioners in mainstream curriculum change. Most commonly, this change is conceptualised in technical and programmatic terms, such as the development of learning outcomes. For example, Evans (1987: 24) argues for ‘looking at a syllabus, and turning it on its head. Instead of describing the ground to be covered in a course, it means thinking about a course in terms of asking what a student can do at the end of the course, given that that ground has been covered’.

Such a position does not go far enough for many proponents of RPL. The South African RPL literature picks up most pointedly on relationships between curriculum and knowledge and power, at various levels. According to Ralphs and Motala (2000: 4), it has been possible to ask particular kinds of questions in post-apartheid South Africa because, 'as a society in transition we have not collectively decided on what knowledge is important, how to determine the social and individual value of such knowledge, how such knowledge is to be assessed, who will be responsible for making such value judgments and other similar questions'. These questions point to the fact that 'constructions of knowledge – what is worth knowing and (then) how knowledge is assessed – reflect particular power relations in society' (Ballim *et al.* 2000: 189). Michelson (1996c) argues that what is needed is a radical reappraisal of the 'kinds of knowledge we value' and university validation of prior learning that 'provided the insurgent skills and knowledge that led to its [apartheid's] overthrow'. In a similar vein, Breier (1996) makes the point that the development of national unit standards in South Africa will have little effect on inclusiveness and the success of RPL unless they embody the types of knowledge that characterise informal learning processes and non-dominant discourses and knowledges¹⁴.

At the level of individual curricula, Michelson (1996b: 648-9) exhorts RPL practitioners to concern themselves with substantive change. She argues for the 'recognition of knowledge once despised as too close to the material reproduction of life for academic legitimacy'.

Taking a postmodern position in relation to knowledge, she asserts the need for RPL practitioners to, 'institutionalize the refusal to privilege academic knowledge as less partial and less materially situated than that derived from other workplaces and social locations'. This argument relies on epistemological relativism in order to advance the knowledge claims of those historically excluded from educational opportunity. It is an evocative call, but one which

¹⁴ New Zealanders have also addressed this issue and have incorporated Maori knowledge into national standards (Benton and Benton 1995).

contains its own paradoxes. In advancing the cause and case of the ‘disempowered’, she seems to be arguing for a dichotomous counter-privileging of informal knowledge.

In my own work (Harris 1999a; Harris 2000) I, too, argue for curriculum change alongside RPL. I adapt the theme of ‘knowledgeable practice’ (Harris 2000) to mean the development of RPL based on contextual analysis (including curriculum analysis using a sketch of the theories of Bernstein and Bourdieu). I claim that analysis should reveal a curriculum’s potential for being negotiated and ‘shaped’ by roleplayers engaged in the RPL process - towards ‘optimal social inclusivity’ but without undermining the nature of the offering concerned.

A close reading of the RPL literature reveals that the relationship between RPL and mainstream curricula is a complex one, involving paradoxes and contradictions. I argue (in Harris 2000) that RPL should not tie itself uncritically to practices that increase the utilitarianism and instrumentalism of education, at the expense of a broader critical or ‘radical democratic’ underpinning. Taylor (1996: 293) takes a similar view and offers an alternative conceptualisation of the role of higher education, which in his view RPL enthusiasts should consider alongside the drive for flexibility and access. He argues that at the current time, universities need to ‘safeguard their independence, their disinterested research ethic, their role as independent commentators/critics, and their status as the guardians of high quality learning’. For him, this means that RPL processes need to be devised that do not undermine the ‘continuing independence’ of institutions or ‘their professional integrity’. In struggling to promote curricula that are more inclusive for adults generally and RPL candidates specifically, proponents of RPL seem to find themselves uncritically endorsing undesirable and unintentional outcomes. Moreover, many who claim a role for RPL in challenging the nature of curricula (and the forms of knowledge inscribed in them) seem to do so from a basis of

aspiration. There is little empirical evidence to suggest that RPL has achieved its goals in this regard, except in institutional contexts that were already committed and oriented to the needs of adults.

Conclusions

The knowledge issue in RPL seems riddled with silences, paradoxes and contradictions. On the one hand, advocates of RPL claim that there are no differences between academic knowledge and experiential knowledge. On the other hand, the literature is replete with references to similarity and continuity between different forms of knowledge, based on a notion of soft boundaries (despite empirical evidence that such boundary crossing is notoriously difficult within higher education). There is a possibility that the dismissal of any discussion of differences between knowledges as conservative and discriminatory, is in itself conservative and discriminatory. As Anzaldua (cited in Muller 2002: 71) observes, the knowledge playing-field is not a level one, and those who declare that it is, run the risk that people will 'stub their toe especially severely on the reefs of social hierarchy which are not displaced but merely removed from view'. Equally paradoxically, less orthodox RPL literature concedes differences between forms of knowledge, by way of advocating that higher education institutions recognise experiential knowledge on the basis of its difference rather than similarity.

The curriculum issue seems equally confused, with few theoretical tools to explore curricular possibilities. Again, the literature is more about rhetorical claims than reality. Shalem and Steinberg (2000: 1) argue that many writers in the South African context (including myself, in their view) advocate curriculum change on the basis of a particular reading of 'conditions of

possibility'. These they claim are derived from theoretical perspectives such as social constructionism and postmodernism rather than from actual conditions 'on the ground' in the institution. The posited conditions, they argue, do not exist.

RPL has an inadequate theory of knowledge and no curriculum language. We need to know more about what happens to prior experiential knowledge in RPL under particular sets of curricular conditions.

Pedagogy in the literature

Given the anti-didacticism that characterises experiential learning, it is not surprising that pedagogy is underplayed and largely implicit in the RPL literature. Knowles' andragogy is foregrounded, with the term pedagogy reserved for everything deemed non-progressive. Reflection (in Boud's elaborated forms) seems to be used as an overarching pedagogical and methodological principle in RPL practice. However, in many cases, even that level of pedagogic discussion is absent. An example of the kind of bland text that passes for such discussion in RPL is UCAS (1995: 12):

The learning that is identified through reflection will then need to be stated in such a way that it can be assessed. This is most easily achieved by the learner writing a series of learning outcomes – or statements of learning achievements.

A close reading of the literature surfaces several ways in which pedagogy makes an oblique entrance. These suggest that movement through Kolb's learning cycle is far less smooth than

RPL practitioners might hope. It is useful at this point to work from the argument that Kolb's learning cycle is a soft boundary approach to knowledge, and proceed to consider the pedagogic implications of this.

Pedagogies of 'translation' and 'linking'

'Translation' between forms of knowledge (assuming they exist) comes to the fore. Lahiff (1998: 133) articulates the translation process as moving from 'process knowledge' and 'implicit theory' to 'propositional theory'. Most commentators are vague about the need for RPL candidates to translate their knowledge into something else. In Fraser's view (in Colley *et al.* 2003: 62), '[t]he way in which the content of learning is approached suggests that (higher-status) academic knowledge can be found in everyday knowledge, but only through a process of translation which involves expert assistance'. For Merrifield *et al.* (2000: 1), the process is seen as fulfilling the function of, 'converting informal learning into certificated learning'. Some writers express the issue of translation in more dramatic terms. For Cleary *et al.* (2002: 10), prior knowledge is quite literally 'transformed'. They argue that RPL 'serves to validate the experientially derived knowledge through transforming it into academic knowledge that can be recognised within formal educational structures'.

References to 'translation' suggest that there are pedagogic processes at work in RPL which are more about changing the nature of prior learning than RPL practitioners would readily admit (especially those who hold the view that there are no differences between different forms of knowledge). Moreover, the actual concepts and pedagogical processes of translation, conversion or transformation are not theorised, or even described.

The literature also contains lots of references to pedagogies of ‘linking’ forms of knowledge. These resemble references to ‘translating’ but are even less explicit about the issue of changing the nature of prior learning. As Cleary *et al.* (2002: 16) put it, ‘APEL is concerned with linking knowledge and understanding gained through informal experiential learning to more formal academic types of knowledge and learning’. For Butterworth (1992: 46) in her developmental model of RPL, candidates are described as linking ‘their explanation of what they learn with related explanations offered in authoritative current research and development literature’.

There is a slice of the soft boundary literature with an interesting mixture of pedagogic discussions and practices. Mandall and Michelson (1990: x) advocate a soft boundary approach to knowledge in their general discussions about RPL. For example, they see RPL as a process of exploring the relationship between experiential and academic forms of knowledge, and of helping candidates to ‘negotiate the adjustment to academic ways of seeing’ and to come to know their knowledge in academic terms. This is also true in my own work (Harris 2000: 79), where I present a possible model of RPL for higher education which embodies a very mixed pedagogy, including for example, an injunction to: ‘[m]ove towards a dialectical relationship between formal knowledge (in learning programmes) and prior learning – build bridges both ways’. Yet many of the illustrative practices in Mandall and Michelson’s book, and in my own, seem to be underpinned by a tacit hard-boundary view. The ‘adjustments’ that candidates are required to make and the ‘bridge building’ are supported by carefully selected (academic or quasi-academic) texts, ideas and activities. To my mind, there is a gap between how RPL is envisioned and how it is practiced. It is seen as being a manifestation of soft boundaries yet (in these examples at least), operationalised as a practice underpinned by a hard-boundary relationship between different forms of knowledge.

‘New’ learning and/or ‘prior’ learning?

Another way in which pedagogic ambiguities are dealt with in the literature is through references to ‘new’ and ‘prior’ learning. It is emphasised that prior learning forms the RPL curriculum - predicated on the idea that it is easier for candidates to focus on what is known to them. However, in a lot of RPL practices, the focus seems implicitly to be on new learning. Mandall and Michelson (1990), for example, recommend a thematic approach to RPL curricula, to enable candidates to contextualize their prior learning. Examples of the themes include: learning about academic skills, learning about academic organisations of knowledge, learning about learning, learning about the sociology of work. Another example is Osman *et al.* (2000: 6) who thematised their RPL pilot with experienced school teachers in South Africa around the issue of ‘discipline’. They focused on ‘critical incidents’ of teachers exercising discipline in their classrooms which were then ‘related to theories of teaching and learning and to the role of discipline in facilitating or inhibiting learning’.

What is not said is that this sort of provision is inductive. It is about exposing RPL candidates to academic mores and theoretical frames. Combined with reading tasks, research tasks, analytical tasks, writing tasks, discussions and assignments, they are academic access courses in miniature. My argument is that such pedagogies are little understood, but clearly go far beyond the easy rhetoric of ‘linking’, ‘translating’.

‘Retrospective’ and ‘prospective’ pedagogies

Most of the RPL literature emphasises retrospective pedagogies (although not explicitly identified as such). For example, in her developmental model of RPL, Butterworth (1992: 46) refers solely to looking back:

...the claimant begins by identifying their area of significant prior professional learning and lists the learning outcomes they believe they have already achieved. They then put together a portfolio with two important content areas: documentary evidence of relevant past achievements supported by a reflective commentary which analyses how those experiences have produced the learning that they are claiming.

Where there is an emphasis on prospective pedagogy, it tends to be downplayed in the literature, even if not in practice. In my own work (Harris 2000), in an aspirational section entitled, ‘elements of a possible RPL model in HE’ for the South African context, I refer to ‘prospective and retrospective’ pedagogies as a way of ‘merging’ prior and new learning, ideally involving a critical reappraisal of both¹⁵. In common with other writers, I assumed no tension between pedagogies facing different ways at different times.

Shalem and Steinberg (2000: 1) reflect on these two pedagogic directions or ‘actions’ in relation to an RPL pilot in their university. They argue that: ‘each action draws on different conceptual resources and thus leads to a very different process of assessment and different description of the role of the assessor’. Using Bernstein’s concepts of competence and performance pedagogies, they argue that in their pilot the two actions gave rise to a ‘hybrid pedagogy that resulted in a complex, mainly invisible social relationship’. They posit that

¹⁵ This may have been the starting point for Shalem and Steinberg’s (2000) article (below).

action one (the retrospective pedagogy) is based on a 'projection of similarity between what the candidate writes and what the assessor knows' (p.4). However, the writers argue that action two is always in the background. Action two draws its resources from formal knowledge and institutional discourses. Such pedagogies embody the criteria that 'are necessary for performance of particular tasks or skills associated with the knowledge practice to which the candidate applied for access' (p.7).

For these writers, the result of twin pedagogies is a cat-and-mouse game, based on pedagogic criteria (mainly drawn from action two) which the facilitators and the RPL 'enterprise' as a whole, model rather than make explicit: 'An RPL portfolio course...sets up an enterprise of reading, writing and speaking which dictates, in an *invisible* way which pictures, statements, expressions of ideas will count as abstractions to be used in order to direct, open or close what can be said, when and how' (p.12).

In conclusion (p.24), they argue that a pedagogy that renders prospective action invisible cannot adequately 'prepare candidates for a learning programme nor...mediate between the "vocational" and the "scholastic" discourses of learning'. Therefore, a more explicit approach with regard to both retrospective and prospective pedagogies is advocated. In a similar vein, Paczuska (1999) argues that formative assessment and summative assessment be separated in RPL. This echoes Shalem and Steinberg's point that power relationships are different in each case and that summative assessment needs more explicit guidance and practice. Shalem and Steinberg's paper is a unique attempt at theorisation of RPL pedagogy. It illuminates some of the complex pedagogies that are largely invisible in RPL. However, it does so in a way that perhaps overly binarises retrospection and prospection.

Ambiguous pedagogic identities

There is very little in the RPL literature about pedagogic identities. Most frequent are references to the onerous nature of RPL for candidates. As Butterworth *et al.* (1993: 16) observe, '[e]ven for more confident learners with recent experience of study, the APL process is stressful in its early stages' As Mandall and Michelson (1990: x) observe, it is often left to the student to 'relate their knowledge to certain theoretical and self-reflective norms of academia'. Shalem and Steinberg (2000: 14) refer to candidates as operating without a full understanding of 'the bases of the assessor's authority'. Osman *et al.* (2000: 11) tell a similar story of candidates engaging in, 'sophisticated interpretation, or guesswork, about what to include in an application'. According to them, all too often, candidates cannot assume the required learner identity, and produce 'a contrived or distorted version of what they assumed the tutor/assessor/institution wanted'.

RPL is equally onerous for facilitators, who find it requires a lot of tutoring, largely because '[t]he kind of learning demanded by APL was new to all of the candidates' (Butterworth *et al.* 1993: 11). Most of the literature, however, makes little or no reference to this, and simply asserts the role of facilitator as helper, advisor and advocate. Mandall and Michelson (1990: ix) articulate the role of RPL facilitators rather dauntingly as, 'translators...among varied cultures of knowledge' who need to beware of traps such as letting the narrative style of candidates' portfolios affect their judgments as to the nature of the knowledge.

A sense of pedagogic conflict emerges in a few pieces of literature. Davison (1997: 3) observes that facilitators experience conflict between two pedagogic identities. The first is consistent with adult and experiential learning theory, and is concerned with 'promoting the

learner's self-directedness', and with standing back to 'encourage the applicant to be primarily responsible for this translation of their prior experience into learning'. The second is the identity of the university educator who, 'could help applicants better prepare their RPL application because of their "inside" knowledge of university traditions, conventions and discourses'¹⁶. Other commentators echo this pedagogic conflict. Osman *et al.* (2000: 17) claim that university lecturers are not used to listening to students as much as they have to listen to RPL candidates, and are not skilled in helping candidates transform their 'anecdotal stories and lists of principles into reflexive knowledge'. These writers juxtapose the identity of the RPL facilitator and the more established pedagogic identity associated with academic development: 'Because RPL rather than academic development was foregrounded, we were not explicit about why we were asking certain questions or why we were asking students to restructure their work in certain ways' (*ibid.*).

Conclusions

The above review of pedagogic issues leads me to conclude that RPL practices have a shallow conception of education process. The most common perspective is one in which reflective processes unproblematically enable candidates to cross soft boundaries. Yet, the under the surface discourse with its references to 'translating' and 'linking' reveals a different set of processes at work, which are less than smooth. If this is the case, then RPL practices could be accused of speaking as if there is a soft boundary and acting as if there is a hard one. Figure 1 (below) captures various implicit understandings. In response to this, several writers argue for more formalised pedagogies in RPL. A further paradox concerns the identity demands that RPL makes on the candidates and facilitators, with neither in what could be called a 'normal'

¹⁶ These identities link with Shalem and Steinberg's (2000) retrospective and prospective pedagogies.

role. There seems to be a culture of silence surrounding the frequently inductive nature of RPL processes and again, much of the literature is more aspirational than actual. In fact, at times the literature is simply misleading.

We need to know more about what actually happens, pedagogically, inside an RPL practice, and more about candidate and facilitator identities.

Position re: knowledge	Position re: knowledge boundaries	Pedagogy
‘Same knowledge’	Soft	Equivalence and knowledge ‘matching’
‘Similar to’ knowledge	Soft	Translation
‘Different from’	Hard	New learning
‘Different from’ and ‘subjugated’	Change the boundary	Counter-privileging

Figure 1: Knowledges and pedagogies in the RPL literature.

Power issues in the literature: ‘RPL is on the side of the Angels’¹⁷

The RPL literature is replete with references to the beneficial effects of RPL for all parties. I have drawn attention to this phenomenon in my earlier work (Harris 1999a; Harris 2000b). Writers tend to claim some or all of the following in the name of RPL, and in so doing, often ignore enormous gulfs in terms of values and interests.

Individual empowerment

This is one of the most common themes in the RPL literature. Brennan (in Crocker *et al.* 1998: iii) writes about RPL as a ‘liberating and potentially life-transforming force’. Fehnel (1994: 26) refers to RPL as being ‘a very powerful affirmation of the individual, which frequently results in a new sense of self-confidence and empowerment’. At the above-mentioned conference, Evans also included on his overhead transparency the self-evident truth that, ‘Anyone who has worked with RPL claimants knows that it can be a transforming personal experience’. Osman *et al.* (2000: 18) take issue with the idea of individual empowerment through RPL. In their pilot they found that RPL had the opposite effect on candidates. They argue that the exercise of selecting a ‘critical incident’ from work life and theorising that, led to a situation in which:

...students were working at the cutting edge of what they know and writing about an unsolved problem made them acutely aware of the feeling that they don’t know. A problem was something to be overcome and put aside as quickly as possible, not something to be explored,

¹⁷ This quote is from an overhead transparency presented by Norman Evans to the first international conference on RPL in South Africa. The conference was called ‘RPL Challenges Higher Education and Workplace Practice: A Training and Policy Conference on the Recognition of Prior Learning’, organised by JET, and held at the Eskom Training Centre, Midrand, 3-5 October 2000.

and particularly not something to write about so to demonstrate one's knowledge (Osman *et al.* 2000: 18).

Some critiques of over-determined claims to individual empowerment refer to the overlooking of power and authority issues. From a critical vantage point, Fraser (1995: 140) comments that RPL 'fails to address either societal inequality or the sheer irrationality so often at the heart of our humanity'. She claims that RPL does not problematise the boundary between private and public worlds; a boundary that is laden with issues of social and political history, of which many RPL practitioners seem to be unaware. Lahiff (1998: 145) argues that, paradoxically, claims to empowerment in RPL operate within a framework of equity or equality of opportunity which 'is defined within the value system of bourgeois individualism: free choice and a level playing-field', that is, within a framework that denies the existence of what it seeks to overcome.

Other criticisms centre on the stress on individualism in RPL, which it is argued takes some candidates away from a more collective learner identity. Breier (2001: 104), for example, argues that for some candidates RPL involves a shift, if only temporarily, 'from a collective to an individual identity'. Cooper (1998: 153) notes how collective approaches to knowledge production were highly significant in the South African labour movement in the seventies and eighties, and how these approaches are challenged by educational reforms such as national standards and RPL, which signal a move to individualised 'upward mobility' and 'career paths'.

Democratising the educational institution through RPL

Much literature stresses the contribution of RPL to the democratisation of educational institutions (for example, Evans 1988; UCAS 1995). Linked to these claims are assumptions that the academy benefits intellectually from bringing the 'fresh air of everyday experience into academic discourse' (Michelson 1998a: 43), and from engaging with 'the practical activity of the nonacademic world' (Mandell and Michelson 1990: 7). In these ways, RPL is seen to be part of a process of enriching educational institutions, and of making them less conservative and more orientated to social justice.

Criticisms of institutional democratisation via RPL centre on the rise of the discourse of managerialism and economization in education. The arguments are that RPL practices and practitioners have inadvertently been co-opted into that frame. For Peters (2001: 314), although RPL can be seen as 'part of the "marketisation" process that is taking place in higher education along with modular course structures and credit accumulation and transfer schemes', there remains scope for it to be rethought in order to stimulate institutional change. I put forward a similar view (in Harris 2000), with my 'Trojan Horse' model of RPL, where I propose that RPL, if approached as 'knowledgeable practice' can be part of shaping institutional practices towards greater social responsiveness. Spencer *et al.* (2000: 2) are less optimistic. For them, far from being a mechanism to 'topple the windmills of a traditional educational establishment', RPL should be seen as, 'supporting the movement from "education to credential", where learning is 'turned into abstract, individualised credits that bear little or no relation to the concrete, socially-embedded practices from which they emerged' (p.3). The same writers argue that RPL practices have become more and more instrumental, and increasingly tend to endorse uncritically, in the name of 'democracy' or

‘progressivism’, an ‘unrelenting desire: to facilitate the unhindered exchange of any one form of learning for any other’ (Briton *et al.* 1998: 2). They conclude by arguing that RPL practitioners need to be more reflexive about their role in a ‘credential obsessed “learning society”’ (Spencer *et al.* 2000: 2) because, ‘[h]aving already lost adult education to credentialism’, they ‘are about to lose informal education to the same scourge’ (Spencer *et al.* 1999: 191). This lack of reflexivity, they claim, leads to a curious meeting of minds between ‘progressives’ and ‘conservatives’. RPL practitioners see themselves as the former whilst supporting changes in education which are probably less democratic than those which they seek to supersede. Lahiff (1998: 138), drawing on Usher, raises an interesting point about the status of RPL practitioners within their institutions in terms of their capacity to retain a democratising agenda of any sort. First, they are themselves very marginal in most cases, and secondly, the less marginal they become, the more they are likely to get ‘caught up in protecting the status quo’ of the academy.

Radical social change through RPL

RPL has also been linked to more radical forms of social change. Zakos (1997: 2) adopts a redemptive tone in his argument that RPL can help address the ‘gap between the “haves” and “have nots” in Canada’. He goes further and argues for RPL as a panacea for the ravages of globalisation, for those who find themselves at ‘the mercy of the relentless forces of the global marketplace’ (p.3). He claims that RPL can act as a support to adults in their ‘efforts to cope with the worry, fear and frustration of a bleak future’ because it taps into humanity’s ‘inborn ability to solve most of the problems that challenge our survival and ability to function more fully’ (p.2).

Many radical claims for RPL emanate from South African literature. Ralphs and Motala (2000: 1) argue that for millions of adults living under apartheid, '[e]xperiential learning was the order of the day at work, at home and in the community. In many instances this included the learning embedded in powerful social movements through which people came to understand, plan and protract the struggle for liberation at home, in the workplace and internationally'. Whilst this is undoubtedly true, the writers make a significant jump in arguing that RPL is one of the primary vehicles for social transformation:

The recognition of prior learning (RPL) is potentially one of the most significant keys to the transformation of the systems of learning and assessment in a democratic South Africa – a transformation that has as its primary mission the development of a learning nation capable of meeting the enormous challenges that face it (Ralphs and Motala 2000: 1).

Fehnel (1994: 28), also writing in the South African context, similarly argues for RPL in terms of benefits for the working class as a whole. He links RPL to affirmative action and is of the view that RPL proposals 'hold out the opportunity of opening doors which have effectively been closed to thousands of disadvantaged South Africans'.

High minded aspirations regarding radical social change are, however, not always consistent. For example Zakos, in an earlier paper (1991: 2), as well as claiming redemptive potential for RPL, unproblematically links it to economic imperatives in: 'the need for continuous learning in a highly competitive global economy'. Such slippage is common. Evans, renowned for his social justice and humanistic orientation to RPL, makes a similar elision when he claims (at the international conference in South Africa) that 'RPL is irresistible in the contemporary world of global economy'.

Empirical research in South Africa undermines many radical claims. Lugg *et al.* (1997) report on two national pilots undertaken in workplaces, with union involvement, one in the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) and one in the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM). The writers argue that there were different interests and competing agendas at work within RPL. For management, the agenda 'was one which spoke about the needs and requirements of the globalizing context of production' (p.2), whereas the COSATU vision was one of 'human resource development in the context of social transformation' (p.3). Workers' views revolved around, 'improved material conditions of increased pay, for acknowledgement of their contribution to the company by being re-graded, and for having increased opportunities for training and advancement in the company'. Once the pilots were completed, no reconciliation of the opposing views was possible. The writers conclude that differing interests and values need to be addressed at the outset, otherwise, RPL: 'can lead to increased polarization and with this increased disadvantage' (p.6). Spencer *et al.* (1999: 192) echo this sentiment in relation to the Canadian labour movement. They suggest that RPL could be used to restrict worker access to education and training allowing employers to claim that they already have a highly skilled workforce. Such empirical evidence and claims are a long way from easy RPL rhetoric.

Social inclusion and RPL

Social inclusion is a major benefit frequently ascribed to RPL. For example, Evans and Turner (1993: 3) assert that RPL can be investigated in terms of 'those sections of the population which are not well represented in higher education'. However, where such investigations have taken place the results have been far from promising. Even Zakos (1991: 6) is forced to

concede, that '[t]he skills and knowledge needed by learners to be successful in assessing prior learning do not seem to be as readily acceptable for diverse groups of people from a variety of cultural and ethnic backgrounds'.

In a survey of RPL in post-secondary education in Australia, Wheelahan *et al.* (2003: 1) observe that, 'despite the prominence given to RPL in policy frameworks, we have found that the take-up of RPL is relatively low, and that it has not acted as a mechanism for social inclusion to education and training pathways for students from disadvantaged backgrounds'. In their wide-ranging research, Cleary *et al.* (2001, 2002) draw attention to RPL not attracting candidates from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. Likewise, in their mapping of the state of the art of RPL in higher education in England, Merrifield *et al.* (2000: 34) note that RPL has not taken off as a means of widening participation. One of their interviewees captures the social inclusion paradox in the observation that, '[t]he way it's developed here it's seen as a tool for fast-tracking people who would be here anyway'.

Despite the above acknowledgements of a less than glowing track record in the area of social inclusion, little detailed analysis is offered. Merrifield *et al.* (2000: 52) attribute some of the failings to lack of 'common experience' between assessor and candidate. Several writers note that socially and educationally excluded students need more support in RPL on account of their not having academic literacy, and not being conversant with theory. These 'reasons' raise one of the most serious (to my mind) paradoxes of RPL. That is, that the processes as they currently exist, seem to be requiring of exactly the same areas of knowledge and skills that have given rise to exclusion from formal education in the first place. Wheelahan *et al.* (2003: 13) suggest that RPL requires that candidates have insider academic knowledge, at an almost meta-level:

The paradox of RPL is that it is assessing an individual's learning that has occurred mostly *outside* formal education and training, but it requires high levels of knowledge of these formal education and training contexts and the structure of qualifications and language used in education, to prepare a successful RPL application.

Conclusions

There is an over-emphasised sense of the potential of RPL. Very loose notions of individual empowerment and confidence are deployed in the literature. It also seems that 'progressive' notions of social justice have been conflated with managerial approaches associated with the rise of credentialism in education. The 'progressive' project of RPL appears not to have taken account of larger material and symbolic power differentials, over which RPL has little control, or indeed, of which it has little understanding (despite its glib rhetoric). Furthermore, there is little theorisation of the actual processes of inclusion and exclusion within RPL practices. The result is practices that speak a language of challenge and empowerment that seem not to be substantiated in practice. I would contend that all of the above paradoxes and contradictions are somewhat silenced by an aspirational and advocacy RPL discourse, within which any criticism is taken as an attack on the very principles themselves. There is a strong possibility that RPL embodies its own power relationships and power-effects, despite rhetoric to the contrary.

We need to know more about how power operates in and around RPL. Who exercises what power, how and when?

Part Three: Initial contours and parameters for my study

This final part of this review is concerned with defining the precise nature of my study. In the preceding part, I identified the following research questions based on silences, paradoxes and contradictions in the RPL literature. They span knowledge, pedagogy, power and identity:

- *What happens to prior experiential knowledge inside RPL under particular sets of curricular conditions?*
- *What is the pedagogy of RPL?*
- *How does power operate in and around RPL?*
- *What identities are taken up in and around RPL?*

Given these questions, it remains for me to sketch the contours and parameters of my study. I do this by an initial consideration of methodology, theoretical framings and site, in ways that will be expanded upon in forthcoming chapters.

Methodologies in the RPL literature

The bulk of RPL literature is concerned with evaluating pilot projects. Evaluations are usually undertaken by enthusiasts, which tends to blight the results (for example, Storan 1998; Evans and Turner 1993; Evans 1994, 1997, 1998; LET 1995). Some of the reports are more critical and theoretically evaluative and grounded in empirical data. Seldom do reports of pilot

projects contain any specific research questions, although South African research is an exception.

There are a significant number of surveys and mappings of RPL practices in and across contexts, usually involving questionnaires and in-depth case studies. These are concerned with ascertaining how much RPL there is. They sometimes involve a comparative element, which tends not to be particularly useful (perhaps because specific comparative education methodologies are not deployed). Several writers are concerned with researching barriers to implementing RPL. For example, Peters *et al.* (1999) undertook interviews with university staff and RPL practitioners to try to establish reasons why RPL was not taking off in their institution. I found one example of a participatory, social approach to RPL research (Lugg *et al.* 1997). This involved collaboration between workers and researchers within trade union structures. As the writers outline: 'The project was set up, managed and facilitated by the workers within the group discussions, by the research team and within union structures. The decisions taken, and the new knowledge gained, are owned by the collective' (12). I came across a small number of feasibility studies to explore the viability of RPL in particular contexts. Leuddeke (1997) writes about one such study in Canada, which undertook a range of interviews with various stakeholders over a three year period.

There is very little primary academic empirical research. I came across only three examples of this type. The first was undertaken in the USA at the very beginning of the RPL innovation. It was a research project undertaken by educational psychologists at Princeton University (Willingham 1976).

The second piece of work that falls into this category is the research project that I coordinated, in South Africa. This addressed three central research questions:

- What is RPL?
- Does the concept have applicability in the South African higher education context?
- If it does have application, what forms might it take?

The project was structured by the practice of theoretical and applied research in university contexts. Its aims were to create a theoretical frame for RPL; to evaluate developments in other parts of the world; and to undertake situational analyses in two professional fields in preparation for piloting RPL within them. The project took methodology seriously and ‘scientifically’. For example, undertaking the situational analyses involved documentary analysis and interviews. Key analytical concepts and questions were developed to guide the process, and schedules were developed with attention to lines of enquiry, language, order of questions, content of questions, selection of interviewees, interview technique, organisation and analysis of data, etc. Where empirical research was foregrounded, there was a continual interplay between theory and practice.

I came across one PhD (Breier 2003) concerned with the recruitment and recognition of prior experience in two post-experience courses in labour law in two separate universities in South Africa. Breier uses a case study approach and analyses her data using a dialogic framework based on Bernstein’s languages of description as deployed by Dowling. The language she develops consists of ‘localizing’ and ‘generalizing’ strategies, and she uses this to identify interrelationships of formal and informal knowledge. Her analysis highlights pedagogical complexities. Students and lecturers used generalizations in different ways, with different

trajectories. Students tended to move the general towards the particular, especially those students with the least formal education. Lecturers tended to use generalizing strategies, and if they used particularising strategies, it was with what she terms a 'generalising trajectory' - for example, using 'cases' as empirical illustrations of the general. Put another way, when lecturers used the particular, they tended to elevate it beyond its singularity into the realm of the general (p.219). She recommends that lecturers make clear the relation between the general and the particular.

In conclusion, my review indicates a dearth of empirical, academic research in RPL. Most of the literature falls into what I would term advocacy or polemic. The result is descriptive and prescriptive accounts couched in discourses of 'worthwhileness' and promise. This, together with my own prior research experience, leads me to a perception of the need for an in-depth micro-study of RPL in terms of knowledge, pedagogy, identity and power. It is this position that I propose to use as the starting-point for my PhD.

Theoretical framings for my study

The bulk of the RPL literature is infused with the implicit humanism, 'progressivism', psychologism and/or shades of constructivism that characterise much adult and experiential learning theory. It is clear that this will not help me to frame my inquiry. I need to construct an alternative theoretical framework. As Millar (1996: 4) puts it, I need ways 'to disturb the procedural tide of the experiential learning movement deeply, even radically'. The RPL literature I have reviewed provides some clues as to how to proceed. There seems to be two possible tracks for me.

Sociology of education and Bernstein

There is a small amount of RPL literature that draws on the sociology of education. In my book (Harris 2000) I use (albeit in a preliminary way) the work of Bernstein and Bourdieu to begin a process of looking at knowledge, pedagogy and power. Shalem and Steinberg (2000) develop the same ideas into the piece of work which has been reviewed at length above.

Bernstein is a critical curriculum theorist within the sociology of education. His focus is pedagogy and educational process. As Davies (1995: 4) puts it, his conceptual framework offers resources to make consistent links between individual pedagogic moments and broader societal power structures. I think there is potential in exploring his work more fully in relation to my research interests.

Poststructuralism and Foucault

There is a growing range of literature that critiques adult and experiential theory and practice from a poststructuralist and/or postmodernist point of view (Usher 1992; Usher and Edwards 1994; Usher and Edwards 1995; Edwards 1997; Usher, Bryant and Johnston 1997; Edwards and Usher 1998; Fenwick 2001). There is also a small amount of RPL literature which draws on poststructuralism and postmodernism (Fraser 1995; Michelson 1996b, 1996c, 1996d, 1997, 1998a, 1998b; Trowler 1996). The work of Michelson is particularly significant. She offers a number of critiques of the philosophical underpinnings of adult and experiential learning theory, as applied to RPL. A poststructuralist perspective problematises understandings of experience and knowledge and also uncouples the taken-for-granted Kolbian connections between the two, based on reflection.

Only a small amount of the RPL literature draws on Foucault work. Michelson (1996d) deploys his concept of normalisation in claiming that RPL re-enacts ‘taxonomies of sameness’ in classifying prior learning within qualifications frameworks and national standards. Trowler (1996) argues that RPL acts as a form of surveillance in subjecting candidates’ private worlds to public scrutiny (see also Usher 1989; Fraser 1995; Harris 2000). Likewise, Michelson (1996e: 447) asks, ‘[W]hat politics of inspection are being enacted in a given act of reflection? How does relative positionality determine what is and what is not visible? Who is looking? Who is being looked at? Who is standing where?’ Several writers suggest that practices such as RPL actually disempower rather than empower candidates because the process enmeshes them in complex webs of pastoral power (Fenwick 2001; Usher and Edwards 1995; Trowler 1996; Starr-Glass 2002). I therefore think there is potentiality in exploring Foucault’s work in relation to my research interests.

The work of Bernstein and Foucault is suggestive in terms of my research interests in knowledge, pedagogy, power and identity in RPL. I thus propose to draw from the sociology of education and from continental philosophy.

Site for my study

On the grounds that it meets my relevance quality criterion, I have selected South African higher education as the context for my study. Inserting RPL is more complex in higher education than in other parts of the system because of the very issues that are the subject of my study – knowledge, pedagogy, power and identity. My thinking is that lessons learnt in higher education may transfer to further education, but that this is less likely to happen in reverse. I

noted that the research project that I coordinated involved two RPL pilots in two higher education contexts. One of the pilots was particularly interesting because of the richness of the debates with candidates and academics in the university department concerned. It was a pilot concerned with accessing adult educators without the required formal qualifications to a post-graduate, post-experience course for the educators of adults. Many available data were not analysed in any detailed or systematic way. Therefore, it remains an extremely generative research site. In many ways, the pilot was not 'successful' in conventional terms. Indeed, at some levels it was a very troubling experience for me. It stands as a sort of critical case or cautionary tale with the potential to be revisited, augmented with new data, and analysed in different ways in terms of knowledge, pedagogy, power and identity. It was a very unusual form of RPL, but should not be discounted for that, as there are many general resonances. Although an atypical case, it reveals typical dilemmas. I am mindful that such an approach requires reflexivity on my part as a researcher researching my own prior research but I also welcome the opportunity to think in a more critical and theoretically and methodologically informed ways about my practice.

The title of my PhD thus becomes:

The Hidden Curriculum of the Recognition of Prior Learning: A case study.

Having established research title, questions and site, the task before me is to develop a research framework that incorporates ontology, epistemology and methodology; a conceptual

framework of Bernsteinian and Foucauldian concepts; and a practical research design process.

I turn my attention to these things in the next three chapters.

CHAPTER THREE: A PHILOSOPHICAL RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

This chapter is the first of three concerned with building my research framework. It addresses the philosophical picture – issues of paradigms, ontology, epistemology and methodology. The chapters that follow develop a conceptual framework and a practical research design.

Addressing the philosophical picture involves reviewing a range of issues including understandings of reality, the relationship between the knower and what can be known, the purpose and aim of enquiry, the place of values, language, research approaches and styles. In wishing to work from an articulated model of social reality, I am following Guba and Lincoln (2000: 116) who maintain that ‘no enquirer...ought to go about the business of enquiry without being clear about just what paradigm informs and guides his or her approach’. Likewise Ely *et al.* (1997: 230) who posit that, ‘The researcher owes readers a sound rationale for such choices as well as a comparative discussion of the underlying assumptions of each technique and set of results. Without such, we have seen many combinations of techniques misused and misunderstood’. I therefore use the philosophical picture to locate myself as researcher.

Paradigm thinking

I do not find the quantitative-qualitative divide fine-tuned enough for differentiating between research approaches. Formal distinctions such as the association of quantitative research with positivism and realism, and qualitative research with idealism and constructionism, do not

hold. Qualitative researchers can be realist and many justify their work in naturalistic terms. Moreover, not all qualitative work is inductive: some is concerned with theory generation and deploys hypothetico-deductive or deductive analytical methods.

Increasingly 'paradigm thinking' is gaining ground as the dominant approach to understanding research methodology. In coining the term 'paradigm', Kuhn tried to insert a hermeneutic, phenomenological and social constructionist dimension into understandings of science, arguing that recognition of the validity of knowledge claims was relative to belief systems, not universal. Paradigm thinking, therefore, informs and guides researchers, 'not only in choices of method but in ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways' (Guba and Lincoln 2000: 105).

Many writers draw on Guba and Lincoln's (2000) four paradigms - positivism, postpositivism, critical theory and constructivism. Scott and Usher (1996, 1999) contrast four paradigms which they call positivist/empiricist, hermeneutic/interpretive, critical theory and postmodernism. Ely *et al.* (1997) identify four paradigms labelling them positivist, postmodern, constructivist and interpretive. Some commentators and theorists argue that paradigms are mutually exclusive but I would argue that there are many possible inter-paradigmatic positions along ontological, epistemological and methodological axes. In order to explicate my own positioning within this thesis, I shall explore paradigm thinking in some detail, in order to see what, if anything, I can draw from each of them. I have selected positivism and empiricism, the 'understanding' or 'empathy' approaches, the critical paradigm and poststructuralism and postmodernism for this purpose.

Positivism and empiricism¹⁸

Positivism was incorporated from natural science to social science by Comte. I would argue that it has achieved 'straw man' status in the social sciences. It is taken as standing for everything that is wrong with social research (and even natural science research sometimes). The caricature is that positivism is based on a naively realist perspective whereby objective reality is taken to exist 'out there' and to be stable and intransitive. As Usher *et al.*¹⁹ (1997: 174) put it, '[t]he world exists independently of knowers', waiting to be discovered. The positivist researcher is presented with a complex but ultimately rule-bound and rational world where social life, like material and physical life, is patterned in cause-effect formations. Epistemologically, knowledge is held to be objective and independent of researchers, also waiting to be discovered and revealed.

Methodologically, positivist approaches to research are based on the scientific method with an emphasis on the development, testing and verification of hypotheses through proceduralised experiments, observations and measurements. If something cannot be observed, replicated and tested empirically, it cannot exist. The analytical approach is thus deductive, moving from the general to the particular, with general theory built from accumulated, increasingly predictive, acontextual generalizations. The goal is value-neutral explanation, rather than interpretation. Research findings represent the real by direct correspondence with language as a transparent medium for this (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983). Usher *et al.* (1997: 175) package the positivist-empiricist philosophy in the following way:

¹⁸ Following Scott (2000: 11), I understand positivism to be a social theory and empiricism a philosophical one.

¹⁹ In one of the most dichotomised accounts I have read. The nature of their account is particularly paradoxical coming, as it does, from a poststructural perspective in which binary oppositions are anathema.

In sum, therefore, the assumptions of a positivist/empiricist epistemology shape an approach to research where the emphasis is on *determinacy* (that there is a certain truth that can be known), *rationality* (no contradictory explanations, convergence on a single explanation, as there can only be one 'true' explanation), *impersonality* (the more objective and the less subjective the better), the *ideal knower* (anyone whose senses are not impaired and whose faculty of reasoning is fully functioning) and *prediction* (that research must aim for generalisable knowledge from which predictions can be made and events and phenomena controlled).

Whilst many of the critiques of positivism rightly draw attention to the disguised power-laden nature of scientific research, there are also problems with caricatures that are developed in the process. The positivist paradigm seems to fulfil a heuristic function, in that it can easily be pilloried for its 'logical simplicity' (Flyvbjerg 2001: 26). However, the caricatures do not hold analytically for several reasons.

First, there are many sorts of natural science and it is unclear in the above critiques which sort is taken as generic. According to Guba and Lincoln (2000), positivists have been critical of their own approach and naive positivism died out in the 19th century. Similarly, Moore and Muller (1999) argue that critics appear to be unaware of debates in the post-empiricist philosophy of science. Secondly, the claim that logical positivism could ever be applied to social science and to human beings is surely an extreme one. It is difficult to find evidence of any statement to the effect that such methods should be applied exclusively.

Thirdly, natural science is not *only* underpinned by positivist and naïve understandings. Herein lie the wide-ranging 'realist debates' or post-positivism. Hammersley (in Hodkinson 1998: 8) presents poststructuralist views of positivism as a from-to 'story' - from realism to relativism.

He claims that the journey, thus depicted and the 'choices' presented are simplistic and dichotomised:

...either be foundationalists and believe that knowledge can be logically derived from indubitable premises, or...accept that there is no universally valid knowledge, that truth is solely a matter of judgment of consensus or power...this is to go from one faulty ideal to the opposite...

What is overlooked, in Hammersley's view, is the possibility of 'non-foundationalist realism' or as Scott (2000: 14) puts it, 'middle positions'. Bhaskar, for example, claims that reality is stratified, some layers of which are directly available, while others (underlying structures) are not observable, but still researchable. Realism here consists of the view that levels of reality exist independently of conceptions of them - that is, are intransitive. The available or transitive area is close to Kuhn's recognition of the social and historical character of aspects of reality and knowledge. Smith (in Hodkinson 1998: 27) refers to this not uncomplicated position of 'ontological realism on the one side' and 'some form of constructivist epistemology' on the other.

Fourthly, positivism does not adhere solely to a correspondence view of reality. Hammersley (in Hodkinson 1998) argues that there are *degrees* of representation which do not necessarily involve direct correspondence/reproduction. In fact, he argues that correspondence is impossible because one can never have direct access to any phenomenon being represented.

The fifth area of analytical ambiguity in the caricature of positivism lies in the role of the 'objective' researcher. Cuff *et al.* (1992: 206) argues that natural science does not claim to be

value-free at the *individual level*. In fact, the best scientific researchers are, they claim, ‘bold, and speculative’ and capable of entertaining practical uncertainty. Rather, objectivity matters more at the *collective level* where there is a need to adjudicate between competing knowledge claims. Seen in this light, existing theories are only better than previous ones because they have withstood attempts at refutation or falsification and therefore represent the best attempt to date to apprehend reality (Guba and Lincoln 2000).

What I take from positivism and the realism debates in terms of constructing my own research positioning, is the need to think carefully about how I understand ‘reality’ and the status and derivation of knowledge and its representation. To clarify these things I attend to other ways of thinking about research.

The ‘understanding’ or ‘empathy’ paradigm

The understanding (*verstehende*²⁰) approach is commonly set against positivism, although the boundary is complex, as I have already begun to illustrate with the above discussion of the post-positivist, realist debates. Weber’s roots lie in the Kantian idealist framework. His particular methodology of instrumental rationality was based on empathetic understanding and an integration of meaning-making/giving and practical action in the world (based on rationality). The focus on action represented an attempt to mediate between positivism and humanism, as Luckmann (1978: 10) puts it ‘between the “positivism” of science and the idealistic “historicism” of the humanistic disciplines’. What I have termed the ‘understanding’ or ‘empathy’ paradigm embraces a bewildering range of related (but also differing) philosophical orientations, analytic pathways, perspectives and methodologies, including

²⁰ Used by Weber to refer to grasping the world from the actor’s point of view.

phenomenology, constructionism, interpretationism, naturalism, hermeneutics, symbolic interactionism, ethnomethodology and some forms of poststructuralism. I shall review some of these orientations. Although Weber was not a phenomenologist, I shall start with phenomenology because to my mind it embodies some fundamental philosophical foundations and tenets from which several of the above analytical paths ensue²¹.

Phenomenology

There are a significant variety of phenomenological approaches, all largely concerned to free social theory from scientism. Although there is both a Hegelian and a Husserlian phenomenology, the latter (according to Luckmann 1978: 7) represents the most radical shift in perspective, largely because it involved a new philosophy *and* a rigorous method of philosophical investigation, characterised by the work of Schutz.

The 'new' phenomenological philosophy is a philosophy of consciousness in which the human being is located in the centre of a complex system of co-ordinates. Human experience is the 'primary datum about the world' (p.8) upon which objective features of historical social realities rest. The concern is with sense perceptions, imaginings, consciousness and use of language. The thesis is that people experience selectively within pre-constituted meanings, belief systems and schemes of perception. Meanings are therefore always bigger than what is given in a single perspective.

The methodology or method is concerned with the study of minute details and 'elementary structures' or essences of everyday experience as consciously experienced or sensed by those

²¹ Not everyone would agree with this position. Usher *et al.* (1997: 186) refer to hermeneutics as an overarching 'paradigm' and a basis for phenomenology.

involved. There is thus a pre-conscious element of experience or immediate apprehensions of a situation. Through processes of 'review', analysis tries to reconstruct the world of subjective experience to elucidate how conscious meaning-making develops into taken-for-granted belief systems.

The researcher is required to be 'objective' so as not to interfere with the experiences of the subjects. The analyst works inductively between all the data and pieces of data, trying to keep the gestalt. Units are clustered thematically into shared constructs and categories which ostensibly typify the ways in which experience is understood and interpreted. A phenomenologically based text would therefore 'emphasise socially structured realities, local generalizations, interpretive resources, stocks of knowledge, intersubjectivity, practical reasoning, and ordinary talk' (Denzin 2000: 318).

Phenomenology stands in stark contrast to the deductive procedures employed by the natural sciences. Yet, its very subjectivism is problematic. This raises several related cautionary issues for me. First, what status do these individualised accounts have? How is the boundary between analysing such accounts and ratifying them managed? Secondly, there seems to be a paradox concerning researchers' needs to consciously bracket out their own subjectivity (and its location in belief systems) whilst studying the pre-rational (and unconscious) subjectivities of others. Thirdly, it is hard to imagine meaning-making that does not have a dialogic relationship with non-subjectivist elements such as context and structure. Finally, the emphasis on consciousness and deep and surface experiences assumes a certain sort of self – one capable of unprejudiced and direct apprehension of 'real' experiences – an almost transcendental self, the sort that Weber was trying to move away from.

Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics quite literally means meaning-giving. The central concern is the interpretation and illumination of meaning. Differences between Schutzian phenomenology and hermeneutics are threefold. First, hermeneutics is concerned with the interpretation of texts. Secondly, hermeneutics (although concerned with meaning) is more focused on processes of interaction than individual experience. Thirdly, cultural and historical contexts become a central feature of the enquiry. Consequently, the analytic focus is on 'processes of understanding within and between traditions and cultures' (Benton and Craib 2001: 103).

The hermeneutic cycle and the double hermeneutic characterise this genre of enquiry. The central tenet is holism. Any interpretation of a part cannot be fully undertaken without reference to the whole, while at the same time it is not possible to understand the whole without understanding the parts. Hermeneutic research proceeds in a dialogic way between researcher and what is being researched. Such dialogue is cyclical in that knowledge builds on what has gone before. As Usher *et al.* (1997: 185) put it, 'knowledge formation always arises from what is already known...is therefore circular, iterative, spiral rather than linear and cumulative as portrayed in positivist/empiricist epistemology'.

In Giddens's double hermeneutic *all* is interpretation. First are the self-interpretations of those who are being researched and the relation of those interpretations to particular contexts. Second are the researcher's interpretations of those interpretations, which are also contextually influenced. In this way, researchers are involved in investigating the meaning-making patterns of others which requires a sort of double sense making (Scott and Usher 1996). Gadamer calls this 'fusion of horizons'. Analytically, the researcher is charged with great responsibility for

persisting in the goals of understanding and interpretation - a sort of hermeneutic good faith, based on the development of shared understandings with participants. The net effect is a view of knowledge as unstable, or only as stable as shared human interpretation allows.

Hermeneutics is certainly a more complex way of understanding human action than phenomenology. However, there are criticisms of the undue authority accorded to culture, making it unavailable to the sort of critique that is characteristic of the critical theory paradigm (coming up). As Usher *et al.* (1997: 186) put it 'hermeneutic knowledge is directed towards understanding rather than changing the world', and is premised on a 'real' social world of order, interaction and 'persistent types of relations' (Scott 2000: 26).

Social constructionism

Berger and Luckmann coined the term social construction in 1967, owing debts to Schutz's social phenomenology and to symbolic interactionism. They describe their project as being about understanding, 'the role of knowledge in the dialectic of individual and society, of personal identity and social structure...between structural realities and the human enterprise of constructing reality – in history' (Berger and Luckmann 1967: 208). Berger and Luckmann are therefore concerned with the relationship between self and society in knowledge construction. They emphasise their non-psychologism and their anti-objectivism. Thus, although human beings are seen as constructors of reality, this is seen as both a historical process and a social process of definition and stabilisation of an uncertain and incomplete world. The social is important, but social conditions are not seen as objective and independent of peoples' interpretations of them and actions upon them.

The focus is on 'how groups and individuals know things and perceive things in the social world' (Layder 1994: 86). According to Berger and Luckmann, social construction proceeds in the following way. Over time human beings create 'external features' through their social activities in the form of shared and frequently institutionalized understandings. These features assume the status of objective realities (sustained by language practices) which become internalized and experienced as subjective realities through socialisation. The process is mutually sustaining and iterative. As Layder (1994: 87) puts it, 'individuals create society while at the same moment society creates individuals in an unending chain of reciprocal influences'. Society is nothing more than 'human activity which has become externalized and objectified in the form of knowledge' (p.88).

Social constructionist researchers see part of their job as objective arbitration between competing knowledge claims and social meanings. Although it is claimed that social constructionist research inclines towards the generation of general social theory regarding the ways in which meanings are constructed, such theories are not applied in a predictive and positivist way. Basically, a non-phenomenological, humanistic, inductive interpretivism is required, but one orientated to quite a macro 'social process' level.

Social constructionism has occasioned criticism from neo-Marxists who argue that Berger and Luckmann's material/social world is not strong enough and that their focus on the social construction of knowledge is at the expense of 'real' material structural and objective inequalities in a 'real' world. For these critics, to see everything as social construction is to remain tied to idealism and to perpetuate oppressive social systems and conditions of inequality. Layder (1994: 88) argues that the theory fails on two main counts. First, the suggestion that individuals are subjective reflections of 'objectifications', endorses a rather

passive view of the person. Secondly, the view of society as comprising objectified understandings amounts to seeing it as solely the creation of individuals. Furthermore, despite the 'social' in the title, social interaction is not foregrounded. Criticism of social constructionism is however frequently (and erroneously) conflated with constructionist social problem theorists. The latter are accused of 'ontological gerrymandering' and 'selective objectivism' in their treatment of problems as socially constructed and yet the social activities involved in the construction of social problems are treated as real.

What I take from the 'understanding' or 'empathy' paradigm in terms of constructing my own research positioning, is the importance of 'understanding the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it' and of 'grasping the actor's definition of a situation' (Schwandt 2000: 118). The social constructionist notion of reality as incomplete and uncertain and infused with history chimes with my emergent position. The latter seems to have much to offer in the way that it links 'objective' social conditions to peoples' interpretations of them and actions upon them. I need to be mindful of the criticisms that this reality is not materialistic and structural enough; that the notion of choice is privileged over constraint; and that there is no provision for thinking about the effect of macro structural issues on micro lives.

From this paradigm I also take the necessity to find a research position regarding rationality. Most of its orientations represent a marked break with Cartesian rationalism. Yet much about the understanding paradigm is too micro and too much concerned with individual meaning-making processes for my study, although the development of shared (hermeneutic and interpretive) understandings of the RPL process is suggestive.

The critical theory paradigm

This paradigm is associated with the Frankfurt School of Hegelian Marxism. With Kantian origins, rationality and materialism replace idealism and subjectivism, 'Here, rationality not only becomes the means by which we can understand individual behaviour, cultures and forms of life but also offers the means by which we can judge different forms of life' (Benton and Craib 2001: 107).

Contemporary critical theory is realist in a different way from traditional positivism in that the former is based on an ontological position that rejects empiricist objectivity in favour of a view of an objective reality characterised by historical, social, structural, economic and cultural inequalities. The task of the contemporary critical theorist, then, is to shape the world in favour of the oppressed and to generate knowledge for emancipation. Knowledge is not valued in terms of its conformance to scientific modalities or its subjectivist validity, but in terms of its usefulness in countering oppression and domination. Anything else is seen as maintaining the status quo and therefore in opposition to human rights and interests.

In terms of methodology, aspects of critical theory are clearly positivist (in the broad sense of current usage of that term). Much theorising deals with the functional and structural aspects of society with a focus on 'interested' explanations. As Denzin (2000: 318) observes, 'a Marxist or emancipatory text will stress the importance of terms such as *action, structure, culture, and power*, which are then fitted into a general model of society' based on a notion of universal ethics. Critical theorists resist the separation of theory, research and knowledge from practice and action (praxis). The aim is to unmask the hidden repressive functions of things through ideology critique. As Horkheimer (in Benton and Craib 2001: 109) puts it, there is a suspicion

of such terms as 'better, useful, appropriate, productive and valuable, as these are understood in the present order'. Linked to ideology critique is 'false consciousness' - the ways people accept uncritically, unjust and dominant ideologies embedded in everyday life. Dialectical thinking is part of the critical approach.

Criticisms of critical theory include views that research is overly politicised, with a concomitant tendency to rearground issues of theory, method and empirical accountability. It is claimed that it is all too easy for researchers (unwittingly) to impose their political views on others and to conflate values with mind-independent reality. Critical theory often takes on a transcendental quality in which fundamental tenets are 'givens' and beyond criticism, rather than seen as social and historical products. Poststructuralists would question the univocal understandings of empowerment, arguing – as Gore (in Usher *et al.* 1997: 190) does - that critical theory 'has its own power-knowledge nexus which, in particular contexts and in particular historical moments, will operate in ways that are oppressive and repressive to people within and/or outside'.

Structuralism

I include here a note on structuralism, because it pertains to Bernstein's work. Structuralists include sociologists, anthropologists, philosophers and psychoanalysts - names such as Levi-Strauss, Lacan, Althusser and Barthes. It is a distinctly French tradition, inspired by the work of Saussure in linguistics. The root notion is the theory of the sign. For Saussure, the signs of language are arbitrary, taking meaning only from their participation in systems of difference and opposition. The implication of this is that isolated objects, events etc., can be understood only in terms of systems of relations. Thus, for the structuralist sociologist, categories and

structures of culture provide powerful explanatory devices accounting for behaviours of individuals, groups, or indeed, society as a whole.

Methodologically, in reaction against the subjectivism and humanism of the 'understanding' paradigm, structuralism focuses on constraining forces within society which limit human actions and behaviour. From Saussure comes a commitment to finding patterned systems of relations (rules, structures, principles etc.) that govern human activity. The realist assumption is that it is possible to develop objective knowledge about objective social conditions and that this knowledge occurs in patterns linking external structures with individual experience. Structuralism shares with positivism, a commitment to explanation and prediction, including causal explanations about human behaviour, and to the development of general (increasingly abstract) theory. It is the research approach of conventional sociology involving, for example, a deductive approach based on hypotheses.

Much criticism of 'structuralism as methodology' resonates with the general critiques of positivism and rational-empiricism. It is argued that complexities are smoothed out and reduced to particular 'true' interpretations which are rendered lifeless by the research process. Schwandt (2000: 122) quotes Geertz talking about Levi-Strauss's work in the following terms, 'Its extraordinary air of abstracted self-containment. "Aloof," "closed," "cold," "airless," "cerebral"... Neither picturing lives nor evoking them and rearranging the materials the lives have somehow left behind into formal systems of correspondences'. Others claim that structuralism fails to develop a new era of objective, stable, and cumulative human sciences. According to Flyvbjerg (2001: 36), structuralism has been no more successful in this ambition 'than was behaviorism, cognitivism, or other schools in the study of human activity'.

I shall be reviewing Bernstein's work shortly. I would position his work as broadly within the structuralist frame, although he resisted the label - being of the view that structuralist researchers reduced education to external determinations. For this reason he distanced himself from cultural reproductionists such as Bourdieu, seeing the latter as too ideological. Moore and Muller (2002: 16) refer to his approach to research as 'a form of sociological realism in the Durkheimian mode' which they claim 'stands apart from post-positivism and constructionism'²².

What I take from this paradigm is the importance of structural and material considerations in research and tendency to overlook power in the 'understanding' or 'empathy' paradigm. From structuralism, I take an interest in patterns that link external structures and individual experience and behaviour.

Poststructuralism and postmodernism

To locate poststructuralism and postmodernism within a classification of paradigms contradicts the philosophies of the theorists concerned. In fact, the very practice of paradigmatisation would be seen as a power-laden exercise of classification to be viewed self-consciously, with great reflexivity and scepticism.

It is not really possible to define poststructuralism and postmodernism as unified entities. Aronowitz and Giroux (1991: 62) offer a useful starting heuristic. They posit that 'postmodernism' refers to the *changing social, cultural and economic conditions* since the 1950s, characterised by: global capitalism and industrialism; radical changes in relations of

²² I would argue that his methodology was close to the former, in his attempts to 'elevate' the status of sociological research in order for it to pass the test of scientificity.

production and the nature of nation-state; the changing nature of class and social formations; and development of new technologies in telecommunications and information processing. From another angle they posit that 'poststructuralism' refers to *an intellectual position* and a form of 'cultural criticism' that radically questions the modernist (particularly structuralist) logic that has become taken for granted in models of society. It is this latter angle that is most pertinent in terms of my position as researcher²³.

It is held that modernism began with Descartes' 'dream of reason' and mind-body distinction and was most clearly articulated in the eighteenth century by Kant in his 'demand for the liberation of human reason and the rational enlightenment of human thought' (Carr 1995: 76). The modernist project is concerned with the creation of a better society, based on a 'universal essence' of human nature, from which ignorance and superstition can be banished. From Kant onwards, education has been seen as the way to perfect the art of being human and being emancipated. Modernism therefore provides the crucial categories that underwrite education: rational and critical thinking; the cultivation of citizenship; the spirit of social responsibility, personal development, progress and freedom²⁴. Education is seen as an obligation of democratic societies and as only pursuable under such conditions. The 'intellectual position' of poststructuralism questions all aspects of modernism, in short, all the ways in which theoretical sense has traditionally been made of the social world and human endeavour. Put at its most simple, this paradigm is a critique of all of others²⁵.

²³Following this distinction, I use the term 'postmodernism' to refer to societal and cultural conditions, and 'poststructuralism' to refer to the intellectual position, except where it seems more appropriate semantically to do otherwise, as when discussing modernism and postmodernism.

²⁴ Although it is argued that such categories originated with the Greeks and the needs of the 'free man' (see Carr 1995: 75).

²⁵ Some argue that an alternative to the modernist/postmodernist dilemma is to revert to Aristotelian *phronesis* (see Flyvbjerg 2001, for example).

It is far more appropriate to consider 'postmodernisms' in the plural. At one end of a continuum are those theorists who view postmodernism in consort with modernism. I shall call them *continuity postmodernists*. The general argument is that there is not a direct break with modernity. Aronowitz and Giroux fall into this grouping in their theoretical endeavour to fashion a critical educational pedagogy from critical modernism and a postmodernism of resistance. Some commentators raise the danger that such a position reverts all too easily to the social constructionism or neo-Marxism that it builds upon. Postmodernity, from the continuity perspective, makes modernity an object for critical reflection.

At the other end of the continuum are the anti-modernist or *radical postmodernists* who argue that there is a complete rupture or paradigm shift between modernism and postmodernism. As Carr (1995: 78) puts it, such radical vanguard theorists deny all modernism principles - for example, 'any suggestion that human reason may be an indispensable aid to human emancipation'. Lyotard would be one such theorist. Bauman would be another, in that he argues for a separate not modified theory of postmodernity. There is a considerable corpus of opinion contesting the radical postmodernist position of a break with modernism.

Commentators claim that vast and complex bodies of thought cannot be dispensed with at will. As Benton and Craib (2001: 171) posit, 'one cannot think new thoughts out of nowhere'.

Different theorists take different positions along the above continuity-radical continuum in relation to particular themes common to the postmodern condition. These include anti-realism, problematisations of grand narratives, critique of foundational knowledge, rejection of reason and rationality, anti-humanism and anti-subjectivism and attention to language. I look at these in turn.

In terms of *anti-realism*, for radical postmodernists there is no determinate world which can be known and explained. For Bauman (1992: 35) the human world is 'irreducibly and irrevocably pluralistic, split into a multitude of sovereign units and sites of authority, with no horizontal or vertical order, either in actuality or in potency'. For Baudrillard, the postmodern condition is one of hyper-reality and an endless proliferation of meanings and simulations. Worlds are constructed through culturally specific systems of signification; reality is surface uncertainty; space, textuality and signs are privileged; all is pastiche. For many it is a nihilistic, fatalistic, vision.

Grand narratives refer to bold attempts to prescribe human destiny or define an essential human nature²⁶. For radical postmodernists the grand narratives of Marxism, Hegelianism, Liberalism, Humanism and Christianity for example, are all (even the 'emancipatory' ones) totalizing and 'ideological expressions of ...normative interests and...historically specific relations of power' (Aronowitz and Giroux 1991: 68) or worse still, discourses of terror and forced consensus. Continuity postmodernists argue this position is overstated, since who (postmodernist or not) really believes in narratives such as unhindered progress? Although the importance of critique of grand narratives and their assumed meanings is accepted, it is argued that if one rejects all notions of 'big' stories, one loses any explanatory function and has nothing to register anything against. How, such critics ask, can one embrace a postmodern position without reference to classic texts? How is it possible to dispute the existence of a meta-narrative except by deploying a meta-narrative that simultaneously denies its own possibility?

²⁶ Lyotard (1984: xxiii) offers examples of grand narratives: 'the dialectics of Spirit, the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational or working subject, or the creation of wealth'.

For the radical postmodernist, *foundational knowledge structures* are about power. Academic canons are seen as collections of language games or fictions with no particular status or objective power to adjudicate other knowledge(s) or to make truth claims. Instead, attention shifts to the local and particular and to celebrations of plurality and difference. Some commentators argue that radical postmodernists' equalization of difference runs the risk of becoming a type of vapid relativistic pluralism. All voices are *not* equal, do not have equal authority, and radical postmodernists do not pursue the reasons for this with any critical sense of history or politics.

For the continuity postmodernist, foundational knowledge is seen as the product of particular sets of social practices which need to be interrogated for their (often hidden) power effects. In terms of education for example, there is a need to be critical of how formal knowledge is put together and organised both at the level of discipline and curriculum. This, however, amounts not to the relativity of knowledge, but to a reflexive position that, as Usher *et al.* (1997: 92) argue, is not about a rejection of disciplinary knowledge: it is about repositioning in relation to it. The key, they maintain, is to remain reflexively alert to the constructedness of formal knowledge.

For the radical postmodernist, *reason* is an inadequate basis for any consideration of human affairs. The shift is to local, contingent rationalities which are claimed to have been silenced by macro overarching rationalities/theories and all-encompassing explanations of the world. There are wide-ranging critiques of this position, particularly the paradoxical use of reason to argue against rationality. The postmodern continuity theorists retain reason as a principle, albeit one that needs to be handled reflexively.

In postmodernism, the autonomous, unique and influential self of modernism is decentred. The 'postmodern self' is *anti-humanist and anti-subjective*. This is a self enmeshed in and constituted through discourse and language. However, realist critics contend that there is a paradox in that postmodern celebration of plurality frequently involves the reinsertion of the humanist and subjectivist self. Muller (1996b: 186) argues this point, writing that the 'celebrators of individuals and small-scale agency' share the 'very notion of humanistic presence and essentialised identity that forms the bedrock of post-structuralist critique'.

Attention is drawn to the ways in which *language* is used to give or take authority and to in/exclude. Language is therefore seen as more constitutive than referential. In terms of the former, it is an organised system or set of systems for directing human conduct (Dean 1999). For the radical theorists, language has no external referents. It alone is productive of social realities in which meaning is continually redefined by ever-shifting relations of difference in referential play. There are no rules, no static meanings, only interpretations. There are critical commentators who claim that power *does* operate outside of language, in non-linguistic or non-discursive realms, and that is it totalizing to claim language as the sole source of meaning.

Poststructuralist research methodologies are positioned in critical relation to those of other paradigms. The scientism of positivism is critiqued on account of disguised power relations and attachment to universal generalizations. In the same vein, structuralists' efforts to develop 'comprehensive and unified analyses of culture and social life' (Miller 1993: 266) are challenged. The shift to the subjective and away from the objective, in the 'understanding' paradigm, is seen as nothing more than a reversal of the objective-subjective definition, which remains the root of the problem. The relationship to social constructionism is more ambiguous. In many ways social constructionism anticipates poststructuralist concerns, but

there are distinctive differences. The former retains an attachment to general theories of the social definition of meaning and knowledge. Poststructuralists, by contrast, view social meanings in much more complex, contingent, ambiguous and incomplete ways (Scott and Usher 1996; Howarth 2000). Another important difference is the notion of detachment, which is retained by social constructionist researchers whereas the poststructural researcher is inevitably situated. As discussed, 'ontological gerrymandering' is an accusation levelled at social constructionists. For poststructuralists, the way beyond ontological ambiguity is to focus on language and discourse. In short, social constructionists do not go far enough for many poststructuralist methodologists. Critical theory is critiqued for its weddedness to the grand narrative of emancipation – as Dean (1999: 61) writes, 'a meta-historical narrative of modernity that endeavours to reveal the emancipatory agency of the governed'.

There is no specific poststructuralist research method. As Stronach and MacLure (1997: 3) maintain, it is a tacit process akin to 'grasping a proverb, casting an illusion, seeing a joke'. Essentially, permission is granted to stand outside (if that is possible) modernist paradigms. A *shift to language and discourse* is central²⁷. 'Realities' can be accounted for only in terms of discursive practices and language, even as the practice of accounting itself constitutes that reality. Language and discourse take the place of signifier (and indeed society): becoming all that it is possible to access through research. As Hammersley (2000: 6) observes, '[w]hat is involved is a change of attitude towards the ontological status of social phenomena: they are now treated as discursive products'. Poststructural researchers would, for example, explore the ways in which discursive products are constructed as self-standing entities and the ways in which discourses and language enable subjects to experience the world in particular ways (Howarth 2000).

²⁷ Foucault's influence.

Most of what might be termed poststructuralist methodology revolves around *reflexivity and disruption*, that is, a learned self-consciousness that spans all aspects of research. I consider five examples of reflexivity. First is the need to expose the workings of power that are concealed in conventional research methodologies and methods. Power is always present in any attempt to know. There is nothing neutral about research. Reflexivity involves researchers exploring the power effects of what they do when they ‘find out’.

Second (and linked to the first) is the necessity to acknowledge the subjectivity of the so-called objective researcher. Researchers’ social biographies are highlighted and analysed for their effect on the shape and direction of the research. As Vidich and Lyman (2000: 24) observe, ‘the researcher is at the centre of the research process’²⁸ and as Usher *et al.* (1997: 210) put it, ‘[w]hen we do research what we see reflected is ourselves located in our biography and culture’.

Third is the need to think reflexively about methods of data collection and data analysis. Any process of collection, coding or categorisation of data is seen as an act of power, which privileges and marginalizes. Reflexive questions are asked such as ‘Who decides what the data means?’

Fourth is a resistance to closure. In the positivist paradigm, for example, knowledge in the form of predictive generalizations requires a closure, an end which is taken to be a determinate point. For poststructuralist researchers, there is no ‘natural’ end. Closure is seen as quite an

²⁸A position critiqued by some for being overdone and boring.

arbitrary matter, to be treated with caution as something that has to be imposed and which is by definition, therefore, problematic and power laden.

Fifth is the nature of research accounts and texts. Questions are raised, for example, about how research reports are put together. Reflexivity in this regard involves writers critiquing their text and textual practices and/or drawing attention to the persuasive but largely invisible rhetorical devices that are used to create the authority of the text.

The 'self-evident' goal of scientific research – to create *accurate representations of reality* – becomes either completely redundant or something to be treated with extreme reflexivity.

Some poststructuralists depart from conventional forms of representation altogether, arguing that however deployed, it has its roots in scientism. For them, data analysis and interpretation become synonymous with creating a 'version', 'reading' or 'narration' of data, rather than an attempt to represent the 'reality' of the data. Knowledge claims become highly provisional, if not impossible. In some cases, the very possibility of understanding is denied and replaced by an obligation to challenge any claims to understanding, and instead to 'celebrate the endless deferral of meaning or the incommensurability of forms of life' (Hammersley 2003: 4). At the continuity end of postmodernism, researchers welcome the opportunity to problematise conventional practices of representation. They draw attention to representational processes reflexively as they go about their 'normal' research business - that is, they simultaneously undertake and undermine conventional research practices. Such a researcher is freed from the search for truth, and can look for plausible 'findings' and/or illuminate how particular truths are discursively constructed. Continuity postmodernists might, therefore, accept the feasibility and worthwhileness of some very modest knowledge claims.

I shall be reviewing Foucault's work shortly. I would position his work as firmly within the poststructuralist and postmodern frame, for three main reasons. First, he is a profound critic of modernist grand narratives – particularly humanism and Marxism. Secondly, he has a view of language and discourse as constitutive, and so, is anti-structuralist (more so in his later work). Thirdly, he develops archaeological and genealogical methodologies based on discourse and power as organizing concepts.

What I take from the postmodern and poststructural paradigm is the value of some aspects of the continuity position. I pull back from radical positions. I do not hold that reality and language-discourse are synonymous, which implies that I do not see language as solely constitutive. Although I am wary of regarding rationalism as the *only* basis for the consideration of human affairs, I value the contribution it can make. To my mind it is possible to remain reflexively alert to the constructedness of disciplinary knowledge without moving to the radical position regarding relativity of knowledges. I also pull back from poststructuralism, methodologically, although welcome the opportunity to be reflexive about the workings of power in research.

Locating myself as researcher

The task now is to craft a philosophical position or 'posture' (Woolcot quoted in Ely *et al.* 1997). First, I reflect on my pre-theory. It is commonly accepted that researchers' personal theories play a part in the character and flow of a research project. We all carry a personal 'theory of theory' (Ely *et al.* 1997: 234) or pre-theory which is partly conscious but largely tacit and accumulated over time. It is the theory that guides our life, our assumptions and our belief systems. Our theory of theory, then, is likely to play a significant and sometimes

invisible role in shaping the nature of research we do and the ‘explicit’ choices we make (LeCompte and Preissle 1993).

A key concept for me is the ‘typology’. This is what I create when presented with information. I have done it in published articles and in my book. I have irked and amused my supervisors by doing it during the PhD process. My documentary life trail is littered with grids and taxonomies – best cars to buy; critical analyses of the strengths and weaknesses of mobile phone deals; comparative analyses of living in South Africa and England. I think in grids. What does this say about my implicit philosophy or pre-theory?

When I taxonomise or typologise I classify things according to similarities and differences. I link things together horizontally and vertically and read off underlying patterns. The typology acts as a heuristic device to explain things to myself. It then provides the basis for thinking beyond it and for critique and deconstruction, although more of the former than the latter. It is a structuralist approach. I am mapping and representing attributes of something ‘real’ and finding meanings in the patterns and inter-relationships.

However, it is clear from the foregoing philosophical review, that my position is multi-paradigmatic. My view is that paradigms are heuristic guides. Following Ely *et al.* (1997: 229), research is a practical activity where ‘interpretive frameworks are very much a *bricolage* with the various components borrowed and adapted as fits the needs of a particular research project’.

What position will my research take on reality? As mentioned, ontologically, my posture is of an incomplete and uncertain real world, one that is largely socially and historically constructed

and infused with complex power relations. This is social constructionism but with more attention to power than for Berger and Luckmann. My concern with power, inequality and structure lends a structuralist edge to my ontological position. I am interested in understanding the constraining and enabling forces in society through systems of relations between structure and individual. As Dean (1999: 65) puts it, there are 'a wide range of organised bases of inequality in society that are more than "regimes of practices"'. I cannot work with the view that reality is solely language, although appreciate the concept of discourse alongside (rather than replacing) structure. In the above way, I see the RPL practice under examination as an entity, socially and discursively constructed under particular structural conditions. I would characterise my ontological position as social constructionism with a structuralist edge. As Moll (2002: 24) describes it, 'the social construction of our experience, ideas, beliefs, meanings and sensibilities within the context of certain...constraints and possibilities'. Such a posture implies certain understandings of the self. My position is not humanistic and not subjectivist. In structuralist terms, I view the self as constructed under conditions of constraint and agency: a view that shares something with Foucault's discursive self.

What position will my research take on the status of knowledge? I adopt a position that is foundationalist in some respects and non-foundationalist in others. This means that I hold that there is some epistemological significance to disciplinary knowledge which is not solely reducible to its political and power aspects and effects. My position does not include the view that all formal knowledge rests on power or that all versions of knowledge are equally valid and 'made up'. Some forms of knowledge are more efficacious than others in my view, although the status of knowledge is always subject to change. I am not therefore anti-canonical in my inclination to transgress violently the boundaries of formal knowledge. On the contrary it seems that one needs the advantages and insights of formal knowledge in order

to mount any sort of legitimate critique of it. Put another way, it is possible to value and deploy formal knowledge whilst also remaining alert to its assumed authority. This is the foundationalist part. On the non-foundationalist side, I see knowledge as a contested social and historical product – invented, error-prone, fallible, unstable and open to refutation and reflexivity.

What position will my research take in terms of the relationship between the knower and what can be known? Am I the ‘objective’ positivist or structuralist researcher, or the situated hermeneutic or poststructural researcher? I see myself as situated in the research context but, given that, will attempt to be as objective as possible. The idea that it is possible to do purely objective value-free research is untenable, as far as I am concerned. My situatedness is inevitable given that in many ways I will be researching my own practice.

What position will my research take on the derivation of knowledge? My interest is in the development of shared (hermeneutic and interpretive) understandings of RPL practice. My approach is constructionist in the way in which I try to understand the world (of RPL) through the eyes of others. It is this socially constructed reality that I wish to apprehend as accurately as possible in my PhD - a reality not as it was in an objective sense, but *as it was for us*. This suggests an inductive yet theoretically-informed type of theme analysis.

The above paragraph implies a posture regarding the *representation of knowledge*. For many commentators (including Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983: 205) there seem to be few choices - only ‘the traditional philosophic view that description and interpretation ultimately must correspond to the ways things really are...[or]...a nihilist view that physical reality, the body, and history are whatever we take them to be’. I do not propose to take either position. I see

representation as problematic and difficult but not in need of jettisoning altogether. My position is that it is possible to make knowledge claims of varying degrees of credibility, however modest and provisional, that one can stand by. This amounts to more than a story. I will view any knowledge claims about RPL that are developed in this thesis as one might judge a particular sort of portrait. Is it a good likeness of the phenomenon under scrutiny? Does it correspond in some way to the phenomenon? Does it tell us things we didn't know before? Such a position means that I want my thesis to make a contribution to practice in as far as it resonates with and illuminates reader-RPL practitioners' perceptions and can be used as a basis for action.

My interest in continuity poststructuralism still pertains. I embrace the opportunity to be reflexive about what is assumed in modernism. I am however firmly located in a philosophy of consciousness, rather than language. I find myself moving to a position where it is possible to problematise but not reject grand narratives and to be suspicious of claims to emancipation and unhindered progress. To that end, during the research account, I will occasionally develop reflexive comments that address power research process. I will not go as far as analysing the rhetorical devices of my text or resisting closure, because, at this point in time, my prime concern is with developing a conventional qualitative account.

In short, my philosophical research position embraces the following hybrid and complex 'postures':

- A view of a real world which is incomplete and uncertain: one that is largely socially and historically constructed and infused with complex power relations (*social constructionism with a structuralist edge*);

- An interest in understanding the constraining and enabling forces in society through systems of relations between structure and individual (*structuralist*);
- A view of the self that is not humanistic or subjectivist: the self as constructed under conditions of constraint and agency (*structuralist and poststructuralist*);
- A view of knowledge as both foundationalist (the epistemological significance of disciplinary knowledge) and non-foundationalist (knowledge as socially and historically constructed, contested and fallible) (*post-positivist and social constructionist*);
- A view of the researcher as needing to be as objective as possible given his/her situatedness (*hermeneutic*);
- A broadly interpretive approach based on inductive and abductive²⁹, theoretically informed data analysis (*social constructionism without the humanism*);
- A view of representation as ‘likeness’ (*post-positivist*);
- A view that modest knowledge claims can be carefully made (*reflexive post-positivism*);
- A view that reflexivity will throw additional light onto both my analysis and interpretation and my philosophical stance more generally (*poststructuralist*).

My position, a mixture of realism, structuralism, social constructionism, hermeneutics, (reflexive) post-positivism, with a dash of poststructuralism, is not dissimilar to Ball’s approach (quoted in Griffiths 1999: 8):

²⁹ That is, accounting for things by relating them to broad concepts.

I am also not unwilling to admit my ambivalence about certain versions of post-structuralism, to own up to a modernist commitment to the idea of 'the real' and to the constraints of the material context or to wanting to retain some version of purposive agency.

The next task is to add a conceptual framework to the above position. I therefore turn to Foucault and Bernstein.

CHAPTER FOUR: A CONCEPTUAL RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

This chapter is concerned with the development of a conceptual framework for my study.

First, I critically review the work of Foucault and Bernstein. Secondly, I address why and how I plan to use aspects of both of their work.

The work of Foucault

Foucault's concerns cross three broad domains as these have emerged, developed and extended throughout society – 'first, one of reason, truth and knowledge; secondly, one of power, domination, and government; and finally, one of ethics, self, and freedom' (Dean 1994: 2). I review concepts pertaining primarily to power, knowledge and the self.

Power-knowledge

For Foucault, knowledge is an expression of the will to power. His theorisation (inspired by Nietzsche) represents an inversion of traditional Enlightenment relationships between knowledge, power and freedom, particularly the principle that knowledge increases freedom. Instead, power and power relations create the conditions for the production of knowledge – *power-knowledge*:

In short, it is not the activity of the subject of knowledge that produces a corpus of knowledge, useful or resistant to power, but power-knowledge, the processes and struggles that traverse it and of which it is made up that determines the forms and possible domains of knowledge (Foucault 1977: 28).

He sees knowledge as a practical and political achievement produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. Any new proposition claiming the status of knowledge needs to interact with power-knowledge mechanisms of the discipline and is therefore subjected to the regulation of those mechanisms. This decentres the claims of foundational knowledge and restates longstanding questions about the social and historical construction of formal knowledge.

An important aspect of Foucault's early work is a critique of the social-human science power-knowledge configurations. He calls them the 'doubtful sciences' or the 'dubious disciplines' (quoted in Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983: 116), setting them aside from the natural sciences, the objects and practices of which he sees as 'relatively stable' and as having 'passed the threshold of scientificity'. Masquerading as natural science, the human sciences exercise power through categorisations and classifications of human subjects - good, bad, sick, sane, and so forth. In this way, people are objectified and forms of subjectivity and identity imposed (Marshall 1996; Gordon 1998).

Foucault's only specifically knowledge-related concept is *subjugated knowledges*, which refers to popular knowledge or 'historical knowledges which were present but disguised within the body of functionalist and systematizing theory' (Foucault in Gordon 1988: 81-2). Such knowledges have been 'disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naïve knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity'. Genealogical study of their erudition, complexity and difference is seen as acting as a corrective to the ways in which power-knowledge is converged in disciplinary knowledge.

Discourses

Discourses are particular power-knowledge configurations generated and governed by rules of power. According to du Gay (1996: 6), Foucault's usage provides a conceptual device for overcoming the binaries of structure-agency and universal-particular. Power and control are seen as residing in discourse, not in structures, although Foucault (quoted in Sheridan 1980: 127) acknowledges that they frequently follow established pathways of power, 'we know very well that, in its distribution, in what it permits and what it prevents, it follows the lines laid down by social differences, conflicts and struggles'.

As ritualised languages, narratives and ways of being, discourses construct meaning and possibilities for thought and action. They determine what counts as important, relevant, appropriate and 'true' in a given place and time – and what does not. They act as legitimising principles regarding 'what can be said and thought, but also about who can speak, when and with what authority' (quoted in Ball 1990a: 2). Foucault (in Cherryholmes 1988: 3) explains them thus: 'a body of anonymous, historical rules, always determined in the time and space that have defined a given period, and for a given social, economic, geographical, or linguistic area, the conditions of operation of the enunciative function'.

Not directly attributable to individuals, discourses move through social formations as social achievements. There is thus no boundary between discourse and practice. As Cherryholmes (1988: 9) puts it, '[d]iscourse, a more or less orderly exchange of ideas, is a particular kind of practice, and practice is, at least in part, discursive'. Those within a discourse community

establish and maintain a form of control over those who are outside, thereby embodying and enacting inclusions, exclusions, empowerments and disempowerments and stratifications.

Discourses shift and change and are relatively unstable (although some have long-term stability as grand narratives or regimes of truth). They are not logocentric or unified; instead they contain contradictory elements alongside reinforcing elements. Various discursive elements and strategies interact. There will always be traces of earlier discourses as well as a continuous prefiguring of what is yet to emerge. They move 'without changing their form from one strategy to another, opposing strategy' (quoted in Edwards and Usher 1994: 9) and vie with other discourses for persuasiveness and authority.

Understanding discourse is central to any understanding of operations and distributions of power and control. This is difficult because they operate at an unconscious level, often naturalised as 'givens' – as active yet absent presences. It is this control, for example, which causes individuals to choose unconsciously activities and subjectivities conjunctive with the rules and norms of existing practices.

Foucault's discourse is a controversial concept not least because his conceptualisation changed during the course of his work. It was the subject of his inaugural lecture at the College de France as an extension of archaeology. At that time it was the central dynamic of his conceptual system and constitutive of everything, of meanings, concepts, objects, social relationships, subjects, subjectivities, knowledge, power relations. Foucault emphasised its prohibitive and exclusionary principles – the sense in which people are not free to speak anything anywhere and the ways in which certain discourses are privileged over others. Critics argued that the world seems to be presented as a trap - that whatever one might do and

whichever way one might turn there is no way out of dominant and increasingly universalised discourses which constitute the world. In later work, Foucault views discourses and discursive effects in a less determined way. They are seen as offering a basis for resistance as well as a means to advance particular interests; and although they inscribe meanings, those meanings become contestable. Drawing on Foucault, Howarth (2000: 78) argues:

Discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it, any more than silences are. We must make allowance for the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines it and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it.

Moreover, the concept of non-discursive re-enters Foucault's lexicon, although not in the Marxist or structuralist sense as the source of discursive formations. Although there is no firm distinction between the discursive and the non-discursive, neither is collapsed into the other.

According to some theorists power-knowledge and discourse are problematic for other reasons. Hoskin (cited in Marshall 1996: 158) claims that power-knowledge is an unsatisfactory pun – 'power is not knowledge, and knowledge is not power'. He argues that we have to get some purchase on the hyphen or slash rather than simply subsuming knowledge into power. Layder's (1994: 109) view is that Foucault's attempt to overcome the structure-agency binary via discourse fails because he remains caught between 'the determinism of structuralism and the free-acting individuals of humanism' – the result being that he adopts a 'middle way' of joining together 'discourse, practice, power and knowledge into a synthetic unity' for which he pays high costs. The effect is to pitch analytical thinking at some impersonal meso-level beyond the reach of the 'productive activities of human beings' and

also devoid of contextual and structural dimensions (p.111). Furthermore, the fact that there are no named purveyors of discourse makes it very anonymous. Where are those that *do* control power, for example, the bankers and the media barons? On the basis of the above, I would argue that discourse, though useful, remains a muddled concept.

Power

Power surpasses discourse as the central conceptual dynamic in Foucault's middle work. His book *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault 1977) is a genealogy of the development of mechanisms of power in modern societies. He charts the movement from feudal to disciplinary power. In the former, unlimited power over subjects was embodied in the sovereign. Foucault sees *disciplinary power* as emerging during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as a more profitable and productive form of power based primarily on surveillance. His thesis is that disciplinary power moves along pre-existing relays of power, that is, through social institutions such as prisons, hospitals, schools, factories etc.

Technologies refer to four interdependent techniques or modalities of disciplinary power.

*Technologies of power*³⁰ 'determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends of domination, and objectivizing' (Foucault in Martin *et al.* 1988: 18) 'so as to lead useful, docile and practical lives' (Marshall 1996: 111).

³⁰ The other three are 'technologies of production, which permit us to produce, transform, or manipulate things... technologies of sign systems, which permit us to use signs, meanings, symbols, or signification... technologies of the self, which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and a way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality' (Foucault in Martin *et al.* 1988: 18).

Surveillance is a central technology of power. Gore (1995: 169), in her application of the concept to education³¹, describes it as ‘supervising, closely observing, watching, threatening to watch or expecting to be watched’. It provides the basis for information gathering and *classification*, a further technology, which Gore (p.174) describes as ‘[d]ifferentiating groups or individuals from one another, classifying them, classifying oneself...pedagogy proceeds via classificatory mechanisms – the classification of knowledge, the ranking and classification of individuals and groups’. Classification is therefore objectifying. In Rabinow (1984: 7), Foucault talks of ‘modes of objectification’ as including ‘dividing practices’ which (1) divide the self from others and parts of the self from other parts, (2) require the parts to be categorised in some way, and (3) require scientific classification, i.e. institutionalization within and by power-knowledge formations (particularly the human science disciplines). According to Ball (1990a: 4) these dividing practices are enshrined in modern education through ‘testing, profiling, different curricula and pedagogies’.

Classifications become norms against which to compare individuals and plan and execute remedial action, often requiring *distribution* - that is, ‘arranging, isolating, separating, ranking’ (Gore 1995: 176). For Foucault, *normalisation* is the unifying technology that establishes common definitions (through manifesto or exemplar, for example) against which ‘deviant’ actions can be calibrated: ‘By normalisation Foucault means the establishment of measurements, hierarchy, and regulations around the idea of a distributionary statistical norm within a given population – the idea of judgment based on what is normal and thus what is abnormal’ (Ball 1990a: 2). What is established as the norm becomes a totalizing field of activity – ‘a powerful and insidious form of domination’ (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983: 198),

³¹ Foucault does not engage directly with education, except to use it as an illustration of disciplinary power and to argue that: ‘Every education system is a political means of maintaining or modifying the appropriateness of discourses and the knowledge and power they bring with them’ (quoted in Ball 1990a: 3).

and the basis for inclusion or *exclusion*, reward or punishment. For Foucault, then, the disciplinary project *is* normalisation, of which the examination is a potent educational instantiation. Examinations are seen as highly ritualised and disciplinary, in ways that go far beyond the testing of acquired knowledge. Students are classified, described, measured and ranked according to various thresholds of competence and identity positions to which they align their subjectivities. Thus, processes of subjectification underlie the more overt processes of objectification. The power-effect is the production and management of governable people:

The judges of normality are everywhere. We are in the society of the teacher-judge, the doctor-judge, the educator-judge, the 'social worker' judge; it is on them that the universal reign of the normative is based; and each individual, wherever he may find himself, subjects to it his body, his gestures, his behaviour, his aptitudes, his achievements (Foucault 1977: 304).

For some commentators disciplinary power is a very repressive cluster of ideas in which everything and everyone appear to be situated in normalising webs of power (Dean 1999). For Mayo (2000: 113) this signals 'the immense difficulty of negotiating freedom while avoiding the traps of normalising power'. This was not Foucault's aim. In Rabinow (1994: 293), he argues forcibly that, '[t]he idea that power is a system of domination that controls everything and leaves no room for freedom cannot be attributed to me'. His view was that, although there is great strength to normalising, disciplining technologies, there is always room for resistance because power and freedom always interact.

Foucault's claim is that more sophisticated forms of human management were required in the nineteenth century. For these he developed the concept of *bio-power*. This theorisation extends disciplinary power and departs from modernist ways of thinking about power as either good or

bad. Within a given framework (say, humanism or critical theory) 'good' power has to be optimized and 'bad' power overthrown. In the case of Marxism, for example, power is understood in repressive terms in relation to class and production. Yet, as Foucault argues, if power were only repressive, it would be fragile and easy to overthrow. He cites many examples of where change in state power achieves little change at the everyday level. He claims that he does not minimize the importance of state power, but draws attention to other mechanisms and workings of power outside the state apparatus, which in effect sustain the state (Gordon 1988). Foucault presents a theorisation of power that is opposed to the 'repressive hypothesis'. He questions how such a hypothesis has held sway, in the light of so many imaginative examples of 'supple mechanisms of power' in society (quoted in Ransom 1997: 16). Instead, he sees power as something that stimulates action, positive and technical, inducing pleasure, forming knowledge and producing discourse, 'it incites, it induces, it seduces, it makes life easier or more difficult; in the extreme it constrains or forbids absolutely' (Foucault in Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983: 220).

Bio-power is not a possession or prerogative of the state, a particular social class, group or individual. It cannot be possessed or appropriated like a commodity or by contract. Rather, it circulates through the social body from multiple points in ways that are largely independent of people³². Although it needs agents/people to bring it into existence, it is never in anybody's hands. It is relational - exercised through action or through actions on the actions of others. As conduits for power, people are always and already enmeshed in its capillary networks, simultaneously undergoing and exercising power.

³² At times Foucault suggests that bio-power is unintentional. At other times he argues that it is imbued with 'calculation, aims and objectives' (in Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983: 187).

In so far as there are social relationships, there is power. Foucault's view is that power is not in a position of exteriority to other types of relationship, but immanent in them and impossible to remove. He says that 'a society without power relations can only be an abstraction' (quoted in Gore 1995: 184). Foucault is suggesting not that social relations are egalitarian or that there are no imbalances of power but that power relations are better seen as 'strategic games between liberties – in which some try to control the conduct of others, who in turn try to avoid allowing their conduct to be controlled or try to control the conduct of others' (Foucault in Rabinow 1994: 299).

The link between power and the body is an important one in bio-power. The body is seen as 'the place where the most minute and local social practices are linked up with the large scale organisation of power' (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983: 111). Bio-power also signals the power of the body/soul to act voluntarily upon itself (linked to desire), and in so doing to produce subjects and subjectivities. Foucault's contention is that the more power that circulates through the individual and the social body, the more people are incited to action. The more they are incited to action, the firmer the grip of power.

Foucault links freedom and resistance to bio-power, arguing that power and resistance always co-exist. Thus, there is always the possibility of resistance where, for example, the non-correspondence of discourse, practices and effects creates possibilities for new operations. If that were not the case, history would be 'unthinkable'. He claims:

Nor do its illustrations of the multiplicity, fecundity and productivity of power-relations imply their collective imperviousness to resistance...the facts of resistance are nevertheless assigned an irreducible role within the analysis. The field of strategies is a field of conflicts: the human

material operated on by programmes and technologies is inherently a *resistant* material. If this were not the case, history itself would be unthinkable (Gordon 1988: 255).

For Layder (1994) and for others, bio-power is too elastic a concept. It *is* everywhere. It links things together. It works in people's interests and against their interests. Layder argues that this is not very helpful analytically and that the concept runs the risk of becoming 'empty' because of its ubiquity. For him, bio-power is too amorphous to be able to track its influences and/or its effects or to trace its augmentations or diminutions. In short, the concept is not fine-grained enough. Mayo (2000: 4) claims that the concept creates a sense of 'comprehensive repressive power' which, as Gordon (1988: 246) argues, tends to render one inactive, depressed or paralyzed: 'Readers of Foucault sometimes emerge with the dismaying impression of a paranoid hyper-rationalist system in which the strategies-technologies-programmes of power merge into a monolithic regime of social subjection'.

Again, Foucault (in Rabinow 1994: 292-3) takes on those who read him as saying that power is everywhere and freedom limited: 'I answer that if there are relations of power in every social field, this is because there is freedom everywhere...' He also points out that power is *not always* realised as actual practices and, if realised, it is not always realised *effectively* (Gordon 1988). Gore (1995) holds the view that power being everywhere is only a problem if one is locked into a modernist discourse of wanting somehow to be free of power.

The self

According to Benton and Craib (2001: 164) Foucault was the first poststructuralist to view the individual as 'the product of discourse' and language. Rather than being in a state of

humanistic selfhood, the *self* is seen as ‘the effect and object of a certain crossing of power and knowledge’ (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983: 160). This is a reversal of understandings whereby subjects create discourse. Instead, the self becomes a kind of currency through which power over the mind is defined and extended. Foucault argues that the self is constantly being redesigned and revised through discourse. Rather than being the home of consciousness (guaranteed by metaphysics or transcendental phenomena), the self is a decentred force field of conflicts, struggles and ongoing social and cultural construction.

Subject can be read in two ways. First, as subjected to someone else by control and dependence; and secondly, as tied to a construction of the self by self-knowledge and conscience. In this way, the self creates relations of power and knowledge *and* is an effect of them. Deacon and Parker (1995: 113) call this the inter-subjective constitution of subjects. For Foucault (in Gordon 1988), it is an attempt to decouple the subject-object binary in favour of a philosophical perspective consisting of both subject *and* object, both subjectification *and* objectification.

The subject becomes more significant in Foucault’s later work and in his *technologies of the self* which further expand his conceptualisation of bio-power. These technologies link the self and governmentality³³. They permit individuals ‘to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct and a way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality’ (Foucault in Martin *et al.* 1988: 18). Foucault writes of technologies of the self as ‘less obvious’ than technologies of power, but argues that the two sets of technologies are integrated in ‘complex structures of domination’ and

³³ I do not deal directly with this concept. It is concerned with the control of populations. One of the best commentaries is Dean’s (1999).

regulation (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983: 175). Rooted in his studies of sexuality, he claims that, in order to be regulated, individuals have first to be subjected to technologies of power, usually through the discipline and methods of the human sciences. Part of this subjection involves the construction of an 'active subject' who *feels* 'free' to make choices between practices of the self 'in which several ways of behaving, several reactions and diverse comportments may be realised' (p.221). The rub is that the active subject is simultaneously subjected to disciplinary power. The 'choices', despite appearing 'free', are not actually under the control of the individual concerned. Instead, individuals become enmeshed in webs of subjection. The active subject thus feels empowered as s/he undertakes exercises of the self on the self with the promise of the attainment of certain modes of being. The result is self-policing individuals who (with no coercion) become more governable (through self-governance). People are empowered to disempower themselves and in the process, power and discipline are reconfigured and extended.

In the *History of Sexuality* volumes (1981 and 1985), Foucault undertakes a genealogy of the self addressing ways in which human beings have been thought about, and have understood themselves, and how public definitions of 'selves' have been arrived at. He claims that the humanistic self has roots in discourses of Christianity which privilege self-knowledge, disclosure and self-renunciation as conditions for salvation. The first Christian duty is to know oneself through self-examination. There are hidden things (imperfections and temptations) which must be discovered and uprooted if self-illusion is to be banished. The second duty is to disclose these things verbally; as Foucault (in Rabinow 1994: 242) puts it, 'to bear public and private witness against oneself'. The final duty is self-renunciation or penitence, to gain proximity to the spiritual realm via forgiveness. Foucault refers to it as a process of 'interiority' in which faith and self are linked together, '[w]hat is called Christian interiority is

a particular mode of relationship with oneself, comprising precise forms of attention, concern, decipherment, verbalisation, confession, self-accusation, struggle against temptation, renunciation, spiritual combat, and so on' (Foucault 1985: 63).

By comparison, in ancient Greek and Greco-Roman culture, the constitution of self was not presented as a universal law to be obeyed but 'rather as a principle of stylization of conduct for those who wished to give their existence the most graceful and accomplished form possible' (p.251). The assumption was that self-knowledge emerged through caring for the self, not through introspection and renunciation. The principle behind caring is caring for the soul. This carries an element of divine contemplation through which 'the soul will be able to discover rules to serve as a basis for just behavior and political action' (Foucault in Rabinow 1994: 231). There is thus a close relationship between body and soul, but the concerns of the body and personal conduct (of doing rather than thinking) take on most importance.

Foucault argues that techniques of Christianity have been reinserted into everyday contexts by the human sciences and, as such, constitute regimes of *pastoral power*. Two closely inter-related techniques are central – *verbalisation* and *confession*. Foucault's argument is that links with renunciation and salvation have been exchanged for the possibility of reconstituting the earthly self in terms of health, education, self-knowledge, emancipation, personal autonomy and so on. Such actions on and through the self are widespread:

The confession has spread its effects far and wide. It plays a part in justice, medicine, education, family relationships and love relationships, in the most ordinary affairs of human life, and in the most solemn rites; one confesses one's crimes, one's sins, one's thoughts and desires, one's illnesses and troubles...One admits to oneself, in pleasure and in pain, things it

would be impossible to tell to anyone else, the things people write books about....Western man has become a confessing animal (Foucault 1981: 59).

Confessional practices are frequently shrouded in a discourse of welfare. The subject enters the confessional relationship willingly (as opposed to the 'mute subject' of technologies of power) as an active subject, usually convinced that s/he is the beneficiary of benign forces. The experience is pleasurable. The Foucauldian view is that confessional practices and verbalisation subject individuals to powerful disciplinary regimes and coerce them into investing their own identity and subjectivities with available positions from disciplinary discourses. The listener (acting in pastor role) has considerable power to acquire, interpret and ultimately judge privileged knowledge. The asymmetry of the power relationship is profound yet its central principles are so naturalised within the social formation that this is rarely acknowledged. The result is that the individual becomes more tightly positioned in a complex network of power relations which essentially link self-development, self-improvement and self-regulation with governmentality.

There are those who claim that Foucault's technologies of the self introduce agency and are a less over-determined understanding of power than his earlier conceptualisations. I would dispute this on the basis that the self becomes even more obscured, if not erased, by the notion of so-called active subject, because every move towards agency (or power) corresponds to a tightening of the grip of power. Ransom (1997: 25) asks how it is ever possible to oppose or extract oneself from a form of power that 'as part of its exercise, manufactures and molds our subjectivities'. In my view there needs to be a more theorised relationship between the constituted self and the constituting self. In terms of the so-called constituting self, I would want to ask questions about the conditions under (and ways in) which subjects become agents,

including historical influences. However, aspects of Foucault's concepts related to power-knowledge, power and the self do bring a very valuable spotlight to my research questions, in ways I outline after a critical review of Bernstein's work.

The work of Bernstein

As outlined in the Subject Review, Bernstein is a critical curriculum theorist within the sociology of education. His work followed a cumulative path over four decades. It is described as an 'oeuvre', in that he builds a single, increasingly elaborated conceptual framework offering resources with which to undertake methodological analyses and make conceptual links between micro pedagogic moments and broader societal power structures.

Bernstein describes his early work as finding ways to 'prevent the wastage of working-class educational potential' (quoted in Sadovnik 1995: 24). The notion of 'codes' played a significant part. Derived from French structuralism (specifically from Saussure's 'langue'), they took a sociolinguistic form in his elaborated and restricted codes, which although highly controversial, did raise important relations between macro-class relations and micro-educational practices. What I shall call his 'middle work' involves a shift to curriculum and pedagogy drawing on (French readings of) Durkheim³⁴ and Marx³⁵. It is this work (undertaken in the 1960s and 1970s) for which Bernstein is best known. His notions of visible and invisible pedagogies are a landmark. In his later work, Bernstein moved from a 'code-centred theory' to a 'discourse-centred one' (Bernstein and Solomon 1999: 267). In Bernstein (1996: xii) he argues that these shifts are about recognizing a volatile and complex social geography that has 'pushed traditional class-based analyses of social reproduction to their limits'. Bernstein (1990: 165) acknowledges the influence of Foucault on his later work concerned with pedagogic discourse and the pedagogic device, '[t]he work of Foucault has had an influence

³⁴ Bernstein introduces power to Durkheim's historical concepts of sacred and profane knowledge and deploys them as the basis for an analysis of types of curriculum knowledge, arguing that the former provided the basis for disciplinary knowledge. For Durkheim there was no sense of superiority between the two; but they were different. The profane refers to practical and immediate responses to everyday exigencies, without which living would be impossible. The sacred is more collective, religious, shared and social, enabling people to make connections between unrelated events and to transcend the specificities of everyday life.

³⁵ Classical Marxism, Althusser's work and the work of the New Sociology of Education.

upon our approach... Indeed, we would consider that the articulation of the specific grammar of the pedagogic device is fundamental to much of Foucault's work'.

However, Bernstein remains clear that his is a conventional sociological project. He maintains that the fundamental problematic remained unchanged - that is, to provide the conceptual basis for an analysis that can connect, 'issues of face-to-face social construction of knowledge with issues of institutional location and structure, it must connect issues of discourse with a broader sociological analysis of the state, economy and social change' (Singh and Luke in Bernstein 1996: xii). His framework is designed to describe and analyse 'processes of transmission and acquisition and their social achievements' (Bernstein 1996: 5) with a focus on how power and control enter into agencies, contexts and practices to exclude or include. A central plank of the framework is the way in which it facilitates the recovery of principles 'at one level in a mediated form elsewhere'. Although the political implications of education were his initial motivation, these became secondary to a much longer process of describing the operations of power with the aim of better understanding constraints and better choosing different educational forms. I now review a range of his concepts and attend to critiques of his oeuvre at the end.

Classification and framing

Classification and framing have remained part of Bernstein's theory as it has been elaborated. Classification is a structuralist concept adapted from Durkheim³⁶, whilst framing is from symbolic interactionism.

³⁶ The medieval Trivium and Quadrivium and the sacred and profane.

Classification refers to the organisation of knowledge into curricula - more specifically, to the boundaries between knowledge and subjects. It is about the space between categories of knowledge; a space which stems the flow of discourse. Bernstein argues that this space or silence is preserved by power. Classification and associated stratifications and distributions of knowledge determine who gets access to what forms of knowledge.

Framing takes one into pedagogy, not into the contents of teaching, but into the rule system by which what may and may not be transmitted is arrived at and into the 'relations *within* given forms of interaction' (Bernstein 1996: 19). It is a wide-ranging concept, referring to the context of pedagogy; the relationship between teacher and learner; the range of options available to the teacher and learner (including what may or may not be taught and learned); the selection and rules of communication; the sequencing³⁷ and pacing³⁸ of transmission, 'the nature of the talk and the kinds of spaces constructed' (p.26). Framing is thus a key shaper of teacher and learner identity. As power is to classification, control is to framing.

Where classification is strong, things are kept apart. This means that curriculum subjects are highly differentiated. In strongly classified knowledge (similar to Gibbons *et al.* [1994] Mode 1 knowledge) the knowledge structure tends to be cumulative and based on increasingly abstract principles. Along with this is a specific and demarcated sense of identity – the physicist, the psychologist, for example. Weaker classifications are associated with 'progressive' education and with the blurring of boundaries between disciplinary knowledge bases.

³⁷ What comes first, what comes second.

³⁸ The rate of expected acquisition.

Where framing is strong, there tends to be an explicit pedagogic presence. In weak framing, pedagogy is implicit and invisible with 'apparent' freedom for learners. Bernstein (1996: 27) points out that 'it is possible for framing values – be they strong or weak – to vary with respect to the elements of the practice, so that, for example, you could have weak framing over pacing but strong framing over other aspects of the discourse'. Bernstein is cautious about the 'apparent' freedom and 'progressive' nature of invisible pedagogies, in his view, because they fail ultimately to provide the means for success for disadvantaged learners.

According to Bernstein, classification and framing operate multidirectionally and independently of each other. He stresses that (as with all his concepts) they are analytical not empirical, and therefore do not exist in pure forms. When classification and framing values change, power and control change, and resistance frequently ensues:

...changes in organisational practices, changes in discursive practices, changes in transmission practices, changes in psychic defences, changes in the concepts of the teacher, changes in concepts of the pupils, changes in the concepts of knowledge itself, and changes in the forms of expected pedagogic consciousness (p.30).

Recognition and realisation rules

In his book *Pedagogy, Symbolic Control and Identity* (1996), Bernstein links these two concepts to classification and framing – in fact he refers to them as 'functions of classification and framing' (p.33).

Recognition rules refer to learners' ability to recognise the discursive terms of the context they are in. There are power issues inherent in recognition rules in that they are socially distributed. Bernstein gives the example of presenting a paper at a seminar to colleagues and presenting the same paper to a broader grouping of individuals who are not in possession of the recognition rules. In the latter case, it is difficult to understand the questions people raise and the way in which they raise them – sometimes to the point of total ambiguity, where 'without the recognition rule, contextually legitimate communication is not possible' (p.32).

Realisation rules refer to the ability to compile an appropriate text. The rules impact on how meanings are put together and made public, '[s]imply, recognition rules regulate what meanings are relevant and realisation rules regulate how the meanings are to be put together to create the legitimate text (ibid.). Different values of framing act selectively on realisation rules and the production of different texts. With very weak framing, learners never fully acquire the realisation rules. Some learners may possess recognition rules (and so be able to distinguish the nature of the context they are in), but not the realisation rules (and so not be able to produce appropriate communication – written or oral). Bernstein sums up the relationship between power/control and classification/ framing and recognition/realisation in the following way, '[w]e can see now how the distribution of power and the principles of control translate into classifications and framing values which select out recognition and realisation rules to create contextually appropriate text' (ibid.).

Collection and integrated curricula codes

The collection curriculum code is where contents are closed off from each other, i.e. strongly classified. It is the traditional, academic curriculum associated with discipline and order. In the

integrated code, contents stand in *open* relationship to each other. The nature of the open relationship is such that the contents do not splinter into separate entities but are held together by a 'relational idea', '[i]ntegration, as it is used here, refers minimally to the *subordination* of previously insulated subjects *or* courses to some *relational* idea, which blurs the boundaries between the subjects (Bernstein 1971: 53).

In the *collection code* there are tight controls on the production of new knowledge and on what new (profane) knowledge categories enter the curriculum. Collection code is also linked to strong framing and didacticism. Teachers tend to be identified with their subject and the level at which they teach it (their hierarchical position). The teacher has maximum control over what is taught to the point where, as Atkinson (1985: 151) suggests '[t]he pedagogic encounter is primarily a private matter and classroom organisation isolates each individual teacher'. Thus, whilst there is teacher autonomy, this is countered by strong classifications, which means that curricula regimes tend to be both rigid and rigidly adhered to. On the other hand, it is argued that the increased discretion of teachers within collection codes is paralleled by '*reduced* discretion of the pupils...' (Bernstein 1971: 60). The latter are seen in developmental terms with few rights.

Collection code also drives the structuring of institutions, so that we see clearly demarcated and segmented subject tracks for teachers and an oligarchic management structure. Junior staff tends to operate and interact mainly vertically within their subject or departmental hierarchy. This consolidates specific identities through socialisation into strong subject loyalties. Because of the specificity of identities, there tend to 'be weak relations between staff with respect to pedagogic discourse' (Bernstein 1996: 25). On the other hand, these strong internal boundaries permit the co-existence of diverse ideological affiliations.

The *integrated code* makes sense in terms of what it is not: it is not collection code. The *relational idea* is the mechanism for weakening traditional classificatory boundaries around subjects. The latter lose their significance as their content/knowledge is selectively restructured. As mentioned, this involves a shift 'from content closure to content openness'. This disturbance in classification of knowledge tends to lead to a 'disturbance of existing authority structures, existing specific educational identities, and concepts of property' (Bernstein 1971: 59). Thus, although by definition integrated codes are weakly classified, framing may vary in strength (though will generally weaken). As the regulation of the knowledge structure is reduced, pedagogy becomes more standardised:

I suggest there will be a profound movement towards a common pedagogy and tendency towards a common system of evaluation. In other words, integrated codes will...probably create homogeneity in teaching practice...will reduce the discretion of the teacher in direct relation to the strength of the integrated code (p.60).

Teacher autonomy is thus reduced and subject-related identities weakened. Correspondingly, learner rights can be 'enhanced' - through activities like group-work and self-assessment. Methods such as learner problem solving can replace the role of teacher as provider of solutions. In other words, there is a shift in the balance of control, in the pedagogical relationship between teacher and taught. In contrast to strong classifications (with a movement to abstract principles), the pedagogic process starts with attention to the deep structure of the subject. Bernstein suggests that this leads to early 'exploration of *general* principles and the concepts through which these principles are obtained'. This entails an increased emphasis on 'how knowledge is created' in the intellectual domain (ways of knowing) rather than on acquiring the states of knowledge themselves. In making the deep structure available earlier in

the pedagogic process, the integrated code makes visible the 'principles for the generating of new knowledge' (p.60-1). Assessment changes from a focus on cognitive development to an increasing focus on dispositional abilities which, it is argued, increases the intensity of the socialisation process whilst appearing to be 'progressive' (p.66).

The structuring of institutions becomes more visible and vulnerable in this curriculum code. Boundaries between inside and outside become more permeable because communications flowing into the institution are less tightly framed and controlled. Internally, new forms of knowledge organisation require greater horizontal communication - committees, working parties, curriculum groups and so on, often with learner involvement. Staff from different specialisms need to co-operate and communicate within shared tasks. Differences need to be integrated and networked rather than be a source of specialisation and separateness. It is claimed that the integrated code is more demanding of educators' time and ability and places both teacher and learner in different positions of accountability and discipline. However, the ways in which knowledge is organised make the model potentially more suitable in contexts where the focus is on widening participation.

Horizontal and vertical discourses and knowledge structures

Horizontal and vertical discourses are late additions to Bernstein's theoretical framework. They elaborate the sacred/profane dyad. It is discourses and knowledge structures that are central, rather than codes.

A horizontal discourse is typified as local, everyday, usually oral, segmentally organised³⁹, tacit, multi-layered, context-specific and context-dependent knowledge. It is common-sense knowledge in so much as everyone (potentially) has access to it and in so far as it has a common history 'arising out of common problems of living and dying' (Bernstein 1999: 159). It is very similar to Foucault's notion of subjugated knowledge. Horizontal discourses are therefore culture- or context-embedded (within families, peer groups, communities or workplaces, for example – and so, often highly affective). They require the specificities of the particular context (practices and relationships, for example) in order to be activated and realised. Where such specificities are absent, or cannot be 'unproblematically read', the 'competence/literacy' associated with the discourse may not be able to be demonstrated (Bernstein 1996: 179). Although the competences/literacies are localized, they are not inflexible and there are variations in 'correct' strategies.

Horizontal discourses are acquired tacitly in an equally context-specific and segmented way, through local activities such as exemplar modelling. Bernstein argues that knowledge circulates beyond its immediate context through strategies of individual 'repertoires' and group 'reservoirs'. In circumstances where there is free-flowing contact, both can be increased, and exchanges between the two can take place. Conversely, the isolation of individuals and/or groups will restrict the flow of discourse and limit exchange and development. There is a mutually reinforcing relationship between social relations and horizontal discourse. Bernstein sees social relationships as generating the discourse but also, the discourse strengthening social relations and encouraging 'forms of social solidarity' (Bernstein 1999: 160). It is hardly surprising, therefore, that horizontal discourse becomes a

³⁹ I.e. '[W]ithout integrations of meanings or co-ordinating principles' (Bernstein 1999: 160).

resource for popular social movements concerned to empower those who experience themselves as silenced and excluded by vertical discourses.

Like the discourse itself (and its acquisition), ‘pedagogy’ tends to be segmental with no necessary linkage between things taught and things learned in the different segments. In fact, the pedagogic moment may be a single one, with no use beyond a specific circumstance. It is also frequently tacit and conducted on a face-to-face basis. There will probably be no evaluative dimension. For example, ‘a doctor may give an instruction to a patient but not know whether this has been followed correctly’ (Bernstein and Solomon 1999: 268).

Vertical discourses originate from and develop within formal institutions. The oft-cited definition is as follows:

A vertical discourse takes the form of a coherent, explicit, systematically principled structure, hierarchically organised, *or* it takes the form of a series of specialised languages with specialised modes of interrogation and specialised criteria for the production of texts (Bernstein 1996: 171).

This is the antithesis of the analytical construct of horizontal discourse. Importantly, there is no localization and no segmentation – instead, specialised symbolic assemblages of knowledge are integrated at the level of meaning rather than in terms of relationships between segments. These assemblages are created through recontextualisation rather than through segmentation (Bernstein 1996). Recontextualisation will be dealt with in more detail later, but essentially it is about the movement of discourses from a context of production to a context of transmission. Vertical discourses are therefore created and circulated to different groups and individuals by *formal* pedagogic means. They do have a social context, but not the embedded

one of horizontal discourse. They circulate through explicit recontextualisation and ongoing evaluation. The two discourses can be summarised thus:

	<i>Vertical discourse</i>	<i>Horizontal discourse</i>
<i>Practice</i>	Official/institutional	Local
<i>Distributive principle</i>	Recontextualisation	Segmentation
<i>Social relation</i>	Individual	Communalization
<i>Acquisition</i>	Graded performance	Competence

Figure 2: Vertical and horizontal discourse.

Knowledge structures

Bernstein makes a very important set of distinctions within vertical discourse – in terms of knowledge structures. The most vertical and the easiest to understand is the *hierarchical knowledge structure*. The natural sciences are the best example. This structure is usually characterised by the collection curriculum code. The development of knowledge is towards ‘more and more general propositions which integrate knowledge at lower levels and across an expanding range of apparently different phenomena’ at abstract levels (Bernstein 1996: 173). Knowledge bases develop through opposition between theories with (post-positivist) attempts to refute new knowledge/theories and ‘to incorporate them into more general propositions’ (Bernstein 1999: 163).

Horizontal knowledge structures are the knowledge structures of the social-human sciences. They do not give rise to hierarchical structures, but ‘instead, to a series of specialised

languages, each with its own specialised modes of interrogation and specialised criteria'. They are usually motivated by the integrated code (or a weak collection code). Importantly:

The constraints on the production of this knowledge (a crucial feature of this code) create a series of expanding non-translatable, specialised languages with non-comparable principles of description based on different, often opposed, assumptions...Horizontal knowledge structures develop by *addition* of another specialised language (Bernstein (1996: 173).

What counts as knowledge 'development', then, is the addition of another language, often characterised by a new 'speaker' or theorist. A new language offers:

...the possibility of a fresh perspective, a new set of questions, a new set of theories, and an apparently new problematic, and most importantly, a new set of speakers...used to challenge the hegemony and legitimacy of more senior speakers (Bernstein 1999: 163).

Horizontal knowledge structures can have strong or weak *grammars*⁴⁰. Strong grammars are 'based on explicit, formally articulated concepts, relations and procedures, as in economics and linguistics' (p.174). These grammars are capable of generating '..."relatively" precise empirical descriptions and/or of generating formal modelling of empirical relations'. In weak grammars, 'concepts, relations and procedures are much less formally articulated as in sociology and social anthropology' (Bernstein 1996: 174).

Horizontal knowledge structures often create problems for learners. In hierarchical knowledge structures, exceptionally strong grammars means that learners can recognise the language of the subject (physics, for example) and can also realise more easily (i.e. produce appropriate

⁴⁰ Strength and weakness must be seen as relative within horizontal knowledge structures.

texts). Moreover, languages do not change – the explanatory and descriptive powers simply extend. Conversely, in the social sciences for example, learning is difficult, the grammar is weak and learners often find it difficult to recognise and realise appropriate discourse. In these conditions, it is likely that theorists' names will be useful resources for signalling an appropriate language. As a result, according to Bernstein (1999: 164), 'managing names and languages together with their criticisms becomes both the manner of transmission and acquisition'.

Another feature of horizontal knowledge structures is that transmission involves *recontextualisation via perspective*. This means that the teacher chooses a style and a lens to teach through, which are often tacit and invisible to the learner:

At the level of the acquirer, this invisible perspective, the principle of recontextualisation structuring the transmission, is expected to become how the acquirer reads, evaluates and creates texts. A 'gaze' has to be acquired, i.e. a particular mode of recognizing and realizing what counts as an 'authentic' sociological reality (p.164-5).

The notion of 'gaze' (Foucauldian with a Bernsteinian spin?) refers to the learner not the teacher. The learner's job is to acquire the teacher's gaze. Once acquired, it becomes equally 'invisibly active' but enables the learner to 'look at (recognise) and regard, and evaluate (realise) the phenomena of legitimate concern' (p.171-2, footnote 8). The gaze is not a principle of hierarchical knowledge structures because there the emphasis is on 'mastering the procedures of investigation and instruments of observation and understanding the theory' (p.165). There is only one route to 'truth' whereas in horizontal knowledge structures '... "truth" is a matter of the acquired gaze' (ibid.).

Although there are differences, horizontal discourses and horizontal knowledge structures do share some features. They share serial and segmental structuring. Furthermore, both have '*potentially* volatile contents' (Bernstein 1996: 178), meaning that their boundaries are relatively porous to additions and omissions. They also share tacit modes of acquisition. Horizontal discourse can also be said to share the 'gaze' as a way of acquiring particular cultural realities.

Some useful and interesting examples are given. Bernstein (ibid.) argues that some horizontal knowledge structures appropriate/recontextualise resources from horizontal discourse:

In History we have seen the development of oral history, in English the incorporation of popular media and narrative, in Sociology the rise of ethnography, in Feminist Studies (and to some extent in Black Studies) experiential/confessional narratives have been given the status of methodology, whilst Cultural Studies, virtually a postmodern collection code, takes as its data (but not exclusively so) the fashions, foibles and spectacles drawn from HD. The internal structure of HKS creates the potential for such recontextualising and thus for a space in the field for new positions to challenge orthodoxy.

Bernstein suggests that the recontextualisation of resources from horizontal discourse often happens with less academic learners in order, notionally, to facilitate their access to vertical discourse. The danger is that, because of some very fundamental incompatibilities, such recontextualisation does not necessarily lead to more effective learning and progress: '[a] segmental competence, or segmental literacy, acquired through horizontal discourse, may not be activated in its official recontextualising as part of a vertical discourse, for space, time, disposition, social relation and relevance have all changed'. What Bernstein is suggesting is that, despite similarities, there is discontinuity. When segments of horizontal discourse

become subject to the rules of the formal context, learners do not necessarily know why or how this has happened, and are no better off as a result (they do not understand the recontextualisation process). Furthermore, in the process of delocation and relocation, the social basis of horizontal discourse (including its power relations) is removed. This reduces the latter's efficacy as an active force against domination. Bernstein accepts that students need to have their experiences valued, but argues that this should not 'exhaust the pedagogic encounter'. Actually, one could arrive at a situation where there would *be no* pedagogy in terms of classification and framing (because both have become so weak).

Pedagogic discourse

This concept elaborates classification and framing at the point where Bernstein moved from codes to discourse. Pedagogic discourse is concerned with 'the production, distribution, and reproduction of official knowledge and how this knowledge is related to structurally determined power relations' (Sadovnik 1995: 10). This happens through the *pedagogic device* which lies at the conjunction of power, knowledge and consciousness (Bernstein 1990) and is the place where subtle changes in knowledge, conduct or practice can occur, often unnoticed. The social import of the pedagogic device is underscored by Bernstein (Bernstein and Solomon 1999: 269) in that, 'the group who appropriates the device has access to a ruler and distributor of consciousness, identity and desire'. The device consists of three sets of rules, *the distributive rules, recontextualising rules, and evaluative or criterial rules*⁴¹. Davies (1995: 49) captures the rules very clearly:

⁴¹ '[T]he nature of the distributive rules regulates the recontextualising rules, which in turn regulate the rules of evaluation' (Bernstein 1990: 180).

Distributive rules regulate the distribution of access to public sites where the unthinkable may be thought and where the thinkable can only be thought. Recontextualising rules regulate the ideological movement from fields of discursive production (intellectual, craft, expressive) into specialised creations with their own internal ordering principles as pedagogic discourses.

Criterial rules regulate specific pedagogic practices in specific pedagogic contexts.

Taken together these three rules provide the intrinsic language or ‘grammar’ of any pedagogic discourse. They can reflect the reproduction and/or illuminate instability and potential nodes of intervention.

The *distributive rules* are the power-laden *means* to specialise, distribute and regulate forms of knowledge, meanings, consciousness and practice to social groups, largely lying ‘in the upper reaches of the educational system’ (Bernstein 1996: 43). Meanings can be context-subsumed, that is, in direct relation to material base. If the relation is *indirect*, there is a gap – ‘the site of the impossible’ - and it is this gap that is controlled and managed by distributive rules, ‘Any distribution of power will regulate the potential of this gap in its own interest, because the gap itself has the possibility of an alternative order, an alternative society, and an alternative power relation’ (p.45). Whoever or whatever is in the gap has the legitimate right to produce discourse – a new realisation of the relation between the ‘material and the immaterial’.

According to Bernstein (1990: 182), ‘[t]his potential ‘gap’, ‘space’, the site of the ‘unthinkable’, the ‘impossible’, can be beneficial and dangerous at one and the same time. It is the meeting point of order and disorder, of coherence and incoherence; it is the crucial site of the ‘yet to be thought’. In a fundamental sense this potentiality is a potentiality of language itself (ibid.).

The *recontextualising rules* make up official knowledge. As mentioned, recontextualisation involves discourse being dislocated from its location in fields of knowledge/discourse production or 'primary recontextualising fields' (university departments), and relocated in a new context or contexts as 'pedagogic discourse' for the purposes of transmission and acquisition. Primary discourses are located in fields of production. The originators of an intellectual discourse to be recontextualised are usually not also the agents of its recontextualisation, except in the case of the research and teaching function of universities. Elements of knowledge are essentially moved from one site to another - that is, decontextualised from their original location and then recontextualised into a new assemblage. There is therefore nothing intrinsically original about pedagogic knowledge – it is borrowed from other domains but can seldom be directly identified with any of the discourses it has recontextualised (Bernstein 1996: 47)⁴². As a result, pedagogic discourse is always a secondary discourse.

When a discourse moves through recontextualising 'the original discourse is abstracted from its social base, position and power relations' (p.53, footnote 1). So, although the process takes place broadly within the 'discursive limits of what is and what is not legitimate knowledge' (Atkinson 1995: 93), there is a further gap and space for 'ideology' to play - that is, a space for the reformulation of power and control. The right to select from resources in the field of production places recontextualising 'agents' in a powerful position.

Through recontextualisation, a new organisation of knowledge is crafted to embody specific 'temporal internal ordering' (Bernstein quoted in Atkinson 1985: 174). Elements are juggled and juxtaposed in order to reduce or gloss over ambiguity and to resolve contradictions. As

⁴² Though a more postmodern and intertextual reading of this would suggest that recontextualised discourses carry traces of their forebears.

Bernstein (1996: 49) cogently puts it, '[a]t the most abstract level, pedagogic discourse specialises time, a text and a space, and brings these into a special relationship with each other...cognitively, socially and culturally'. Over and above the specification of content and formatting for consumption and dissemination, the *means* of transmission and communication are also specified. It is, as Bernstein (1996: 49) contends, a recontextualisation of the 'how' as well as of the 'what', although this is often tacit.

Recontextualisation of the 'how' links an extended concept of framing to the pedagogic device. In brief, Bernstein proposes two closely related aspects – *instructional discourse* and *regulative discourse*. The character of a pedagogic practice is given by the instructional discourse embedded in a regulative discourse 'where the unit of analysis may be a level of the education system, an agency, a curriculum, a unit of the curriculum, or a context of transmission' (Bernstein 1990: 199). The former refers to sequencing and pacing and temporal demarcations within curricula and syllabi. It gives guidance (implicitly or explicitly) about how teacher and learner should proceed. Bernstein perceives both freedoms and dangers in implicit instructional rules, in that they can reduce learners' ability to 'become aware of the temporal project and thus leave [the child] within the present, not in either the past or the future' (Sadovnik 1995: 13). Conversely, when the rules are explicit, a learner will know more clearly what the expectations are. The regulative discourse specifies hierarchies, authority relations, and modes of conduct. Like the instructional discourse, this can be explicitly or implicitly defined. In the latter case, Bernstein argues that the relationship between teacher and learner becomes one in which power is masked or hidden by devices of communication, as in group work or computer-assisted learning for example.

The *evaluative rules* flow from the above. Their use ‘condense[s] the meaning of the whole device’ (Bernstein 1996: 50) by signifying what counts as counting. They thus become an interesting area of study in themselves – a sort of black box of pedagogic discourse and practice. They frequently have a backwash effect on practice. If pedagogy is about the production, reproduction and transformation of culture through consciousness, then the evaluative rules are the regulators of legitimate and illegitimate progress in that regard. The question for Bernstein (1990: 8) is ‘*whose regulator, what consciousness and for whom?*’

In this regard, Bernstein theorises that there is a struggle between the *official recontextualising field* (ORF) and the *pedagogic recontextualising field* (PRF). The dominant educational principles of a society are seen to be held by the state in ORF ministries, departments and selected agencies. The PRF comprises pedagogues in schools and colleges, university departments of education, specialised journals, private research foundations, professional groups, etc. A PRF can be a complex place, with its own sets of internal and external relationships. Bernstein (1996: 80, footnote 1) describes how the PRF is populated by discursive specialisations, with varying degrees of sponsorship within the PRF and/or the ORF. Relations between the ORF and the PRF are invariably antagonistic, especially regarding what the ORF recontextualises from the PRF to comprise official pedagogic discourse. If a PRF has relative autonomy, then it is possible for actors within it to recontextualise texts which might otherwise have been considered ‘illegitimate, oppositional, originating in counter-hegemonic sites of the production of discourse’ (Bernstein 1990: 202). As Bernstein (1996: 48) puts it, ‘[i]f the PRF can have an effect on pedagogic discourse independently of the ORF, then there is both some autonomy *and* struggle over pedagogic discourse and its practices’.

In summary, the pedagogic device affords a conceptual language with which to describe and analyse the creation and realisation of pedagogic discourse. It is possible to see both constraints and opportunities (gaps) through the device. The process between discourse in a field of production and its subsequent effect on the consciousness of learners is a long and complex one, with scope for interventions and disturbances along the way.

Competence and performance pedagogic models

These are later Bernsteinian concepts which elaborate the early concepts of visible and invisible pedagogy. Bernstein deploys them to explore what he refers to as ‘the critical changes now taking place in the pedagogising of knowledge, its management and the regulation of forms of pedagogic consciousness and identity’ (Bernstein 1996: 4). His description of two pedagogic models operates across three axes – ‘what counts as knowledge (curriculum); how learning takes place (transmission); and what counts as a legitimate display of learning (evaluation)’ (Singh 1997: 123-4). I shall deal with the competence model first, and then the performance model.

Bernstein takes the term *competence model* from radical/progressive cross-disciplinary work in the 1960s, where it signified the reinsertion of humanism into various pedagogic recontextualising fields. The language of competence is one of affirmation and individual potential. The focus is on ‘similar to’ relations, with differences seen as complementary contributions rather than grounds for discrimination (or stratification). Competence is a ‘tacitly possessed capacity’ (Muller 1996a: 9) wherein ‘acquirers are already competent, merely unactualised’ (p.13). Teachers are seen as all too easily interfering with learning, and so an invisible, facilitatory style is preferred. However, as with humanistic discourses more

generally, individuals are abstracted from material conditions and macro issues of distributions of power, and selective principles of control are glossed over. As Singh and Luke (in Bernstein 1996: xiii) argue, a model based on humanistic principles (even of a more radical persuasion) ‘may in fact deter an analysis of the very systems of unequal distribution, acquisition and “valuing” of knowledge and competence that they are so critical of’. It is also the case that evaluation of learners in this model is all the more penetrative (and frequently dispositional) for being tacit.

There are three modes within the competence model. The first mode is also the first historically. Bernstein calls it *liberal/progressive* (more ‘progressive’ than liberal in the classic sense of liberalism) or therapeutic. It is extremely humanist in style, with ‘similar to’ relations ‘located *within* the individual’ and a focus on intra-individual development in an almost therapeutic way (Bernstein 1996: 64). Humanistic parts of adult education would fit this mode. Muller (1996a: 9) suggests that the Plowden Report orthodoxy of the 1970s embodied it.

Bernstein calls the second mode *populist*. Here, the ‘similar to’ relations are not inter- or intra-individual but orientated to the shared interests and competence of oppressed or disadvantaged groupings/cultures. The validation of repressed ‘communicative competences intrinsic to a local, usually dominated, culture’ is emphasised (Bernstein 1996: 64). An oppositional stance is therefore presupposed – between the dominating, and official pedagogic practices and local ones. Some forms of community education might locate themselves here (Muller 1996a).

The third mode follows from the second. Bernstein calls it *radical*, and attention shifts to inter-class/group relations and opportunities. The pedagogic practices associated with this mode presuppose an ‘emancipatory potential common to all members of the group’ (Bernstein

1996: 64). Competence is therefore located within the oppressed group and the focus is on social change and redress. The work of Freire in informal adult education comes to mind, particularly his pedagogy of 'conscientisation'.

As Bernstein (p.67-8) points out, there are incompatibilities between these modes, as well as features that they share. For example, there is incongruity between the liberal/progressive and the populist mode 'because the latter accuses the former of abstracting the acquirer from her/his local cultural context. The radical mode is opposed to both, because both fail to position pedagogic discourse in political struggle'. All of these modes are weakening within the ORF in most places in the world. The radical mode has rarely been present in the ORF anywhere. With regard to the South African context, despite rhetoric to the contrary, Muller (1996a: 14) argues that the competence pedagogic model in all its modes is likely to have a long-term future only 'in early (primary) education, in ABET, and in the "repair" agencies of academic support and development'⁴³. However, competence discourses can very easily be appropriated by official educational discourse for specific purposes, and/or act as interrupters of or resistances to other discourses.

In contrast to the competence model, *the performance model* is the model of traditional formal education. It is predicated on deficit and stratification – 'different from' rather than 'similar to' relations. Learners are active but orientated to future external goals rather than to the intrinsic and introjected goals of the competence model. There are three modes within this model.

First: an *autonomous* and *introjection* mode associated with knowledge structures that have specialised discourses and strong classifications such as the natural sciences, mathematics and

⁴³ And in RPL pedagogies?

psychology. Bernstein (1996: 65) refers to them as 'singulars' and as being 'on the whole narcissistic, orientated to their own development, protected by strong boundaries and hierarchies'. The autonomous mode is the traditional mode of liberal education 'where learners are subjected to the disciplinary regime of subjects' (Muller 1996a: 12).

Second: a *projection* mode associated with 'regionalised' knowledge structures created by the recontextualisation of singulars into larger units. Such knowledge structures span intellectual fields and practices – for example, engineering, medicine, architecture and more contemporary subjects such as communications and media studies – and are often presented in modular forms of integrated curricula. The projection mode is orientated to practice – it faces outwards.

Third: a *generic* pedagogic mode. This mode is a result of processes that do not originate within the PRF. It originates in government agencies, and frequently impacts on further education and has a very strong external orientation to practice and employment. Bernstein (1996: 73) argues (critically) that this specialised recontextualising field 'produces and reproduces imaginary concepts of work and life which abstract such experiences from the power relations of their lived conditions and negate the possibilities of understanding and criticism'. This is where the appropriation or recontextualisation of the term 'competence' (as competency) comes in. The term no longer refers to intrinsic, creative developments, but is framed by behaviourist theories of learning such as outcomes-based education. Generic pedagogic modes and the performances to which they give rise are directly linked to market instrumentalities. Accordingly, the mode is often referred to as the 'economic' or 'market' mode. Pedagogy is explicitly managed and outcomes tend to have a constitutive effect on curricula. For Bernstein, the concepts of 'trainability' and 'short-termism' are central. He sees trainability as something the learner must come to possess if s/he is to survive in the

workplace and in society. Linked to some notions of lifelong learning, Bernstein sees it as flexibility and adaptability, 'the ability to be taught, the ability to respond effectively to concurrent, subsequent, intermittent pedagogies'.

As analytical rather than empirical concepts, the models and their associated modes construct a range of different forms and patterns for learners and teachers – a commitment to maximizing and integrating personal potential in the competence model as opposed to instrumentally maximizing 'skill capital, in a competitive and ever changing labour market' in the generic performance mode (Muller 1996a: 14). The generative nature of the competence/performance dyad lies precisely in their combinations. For example, Bernstein (1996: 70) refers to a particular practice as characterised by a therapeutic mode, inserted into a performance mode, retaining its original name and resonances, 'whilst giving rise to an opposing practice'. Muller (1996a: 12) argues that higher education as a whole is moving from one performance mode to another – from singulars to regions – or even as far as the generic mode, in some instances.

Critiques of Bernstein's work

Many critiques of Bernstein's positioning and ideas apply to his earlier rather than his later work. The locus of critique seems to be his structuralism. This has consequences at several levels and in several ways. First, is a tendency towards reproductionism and determinism and a perceived lack of agency. Bernstein's response to these criticisms is that it is necessary to understand reproductive tendencies (constraints) in order to envisage alternatives. Atkinson (1985) makes the case that Bernstein offers conceptual tools with which to diagnose the complexity of social relations (including their reproductive tendencies and discrepancies) as a

basis for intervention and change, not more reproduction. In his later work, the pedagogic device certainly provides textured means of analysis.

Dualisms, binaries and dyads come in for criticism from commentators who see them as instantiations of Descartes' modernist distinctions. Criticisms largely revolve around implicit hierarchies and preferences in dyads, and lack of attention to relationships between polarities. Others argue (and I would agree) that these views represent an erroneous reading and deployment of Bernstein's work: the dyads etc. are not empirical categories but analytical ones, developed precisely to facilitate the analysis of inter-relationships which they are criticized for impeding. Atkinson (1985: 31) maintains that 'the categories are not intended to represent self-contained entities, nor is the model a static one. It is apparent, indeed, that the analysis is intended to capture a process of transformation and change'.

A persistent set of criticisms relate to Bernstein's early work and working-class deficit (Rosen 1972). The result of these criticisms, according to Davies (1995: 41), was that the idea of the 'linguistic deficit' of working-class children became powerfully lodged in the lexicon of a wide range of educationists, often at the level of catch-phrase or cliché. In some instances, Bernstein's work was seen as a justification for the inevitability of deficit. Bernstein argues that his position could not have been further from that, in that his concern was to provide a explanation for unequal performance not a defence of it. Danzig (1995: 159) argues that Bernstein does not locate the notion of deficit in children but in dominant pedagogic assumptions and practices: 'It is the pedagogical assumptions, which are detrimental to working class children, not a deficit in the children themselves...' In a similar way commentators have associated horizontal discourses with a disparaging view of informal knowledges. This was certainly not Durkheim's perspective. My own view is that Bernstein

presents his work in ways that make these kinds of readings possible. This is not helped by the implicit hierarchies and preferences implied in his dyads, so, for example, horizontal discourse is the poor relation of vertical discourse, and so on. Obviously care needs to be taken to avoid such interpretations.

Foucault, Bernstein and my study

I am not attempting a synthesis of the work of two very different theorists, but rather seek to create a broad conceptual framework to deploy in line with my own philosophical position. Each theorist offers potentially generative conceptual resources for my study of the hidden curriculum of RPL, but in different ways, and with different emphases. The central organising principles for Bernstein are knowledge and pedagogy. Power and (particularly pedagogic) identities revolve around his conceptualisations of knowledge and pedagogy. The central organising principles for Foucault are power and identity (and subjectivity-subjection). Knowledge and pedagogy and identity revolve around his conceptualisations of power and identity. This patterning forms the overall shape of my conceptual framework. The substance of the framework is as follows.

Bernstein's concepts of the pedagogic device, vertical and horizontal discourse, competence and performance pedagogies and classification and framing enable me to look inside knowledge structures and pedagogy. Using the above, and recognition and realisation rules, it is also possible to make comparisons across the knowledge bases of the RPL candidates, the RPL 'curriculum', and the curricula of the receiving university programme, and to investigate the contribution of pedagogy to these relationships. I can pursue the following theoretically-informed lines of enquiry⁴⁴:

- What knowledge structures constitute candidates' prior experiential knowledge?
- What is the knowledge structure of RPL? And of the receiving programme?
- What is the nature of the pedagogic discourse of RPL?

⁴⁴ These, and the Foucauldian ones that follow, enhance the intentionality validity criterion, in that they bring my rather broad research questions into sharper focus.

- What pedagogic identities and forms of consciousness does RPL privilege?
- How does all of the above affect candidates from different social groupings? What, therefore, is the social project of RPL? How does the micro pedagogic moment connect to broader (societal) power structures?

In line with my philosophical position, I view Foucault's conceptualisations of disciplinary power, bio-power, technologies of power and technologies of the self as very important adjuncts to conventional views of power. I therefore see Foucault's concepts as adding complexity and nuance to (but not displacing) conventionally sociological conceptualisations of power. Technologies of power are particularly useful for drawing attention to techniques that are frequently glossed over in 'progressive' institutional and educational practices. Discourse, as a vehicle for the exercise of power and control, is pertinent in relation to thinking about the context within which the RPL practice was located and to exploring ways in which individuals are both targets of discourse and vehicles of it. I can pursue the following theoretically-informed lines of enquiry:

- How does power circulate in and around RPL? With what power-effects?
- What discourses characterise the process and the context? With what effects?
- What understandings of the self are at work around RPL? What subjectivities are encouraged and how are these taken up?
- What role does subjugated knowledge play in this RPL process?

A conceptual framework, thus derived, permits detailed descriptive and interpretive analysis of knowledge, pedagogy, power and identity in and around RPL. It should also point to improvements in the conceptualisation and provision of RPL. The intention is not to create a

new emancipatory narrative, but to throw different light on to existing practices and to suggest changes. I will also offer some critique of the conceptual resources.

CHAPTER FIVE: RESEARCH DESIGN

I now have a philosophical position and a conceptual framework. In this chapter I develop my philosophical position into a practical research design. It aims to be more than a statement of research methods and instruments - selected, designed and applied: rather, a 'reasoned' discussion and justification of these matters in relation to my philosophical position and research questions. I address six overlapping features of the internal structuring of the research: the unit(s) of analysis for the research; the instruments and methods of data collection; the presentation of the data; the modes of, and procedures for, data analysis and interpretation; and the presentation of the data analysis and interpretation. I add some reflexive poststructural commentaries in relation to power and method.

The unit(s) of analysis

The case study

The notion of the case study suits my research interests and philosophical position in many ways. As discussed in the Subject Review, I felt that a particular RPL pilot site had generated fascinating data and would continue to do so.

My case is of an RPL practice in a particular university department. Following Stake (1994: 240), the emphasis on detail in the case study fits with my interest in RPL at a micro level, 'the epistemology of the particular'. I want to understand complexity and detail, how people 'bend, spin, consolidate, and enrich their understandings' (ibid.), in as objective a way as possible (given my situatedness). I selected it, not because of its typicality, but because of its

uniqueness, as one from which I could learn a lot. It was an unusual form of RPL. Comparing typical and atypical cases, Stake (ibid.) argues that '[o]ften it is better to learn a lot from an atypical case than a little from a magnificently typical case'. He also suggests that atypical cases frequently yield the most and richest information. It is for these reasons that I decided not to undertake a comparative case study or to broaden the study to include a second cohort of RPL candidates on the same site. I felt that this would run the risk of disrupting the complex relationships in each.

There are debates in the literature regarding the case as method or methodology. As Scott and Usher (1999: 87) put it, case studies 'can be understood in two incommensurate ways: either as a set of procedures integral to all types of research; or as a paradigmatically separate form of research'. Yin (1994) argues similarly, that case studies can be used as a framework for research or as a method. Given that I have developed a philosophical posture and have a conceptual framework to deploy in my research, I would argue that, for me, case study is a method rather than a methodology.

According to Flyvbjerg (2001), Socrates dismissed case studies in favour of hypothetico-deduction and general principles, whereas Aristotle embraced them for the ways in which they generated concrete, practical, and context-dependent knowledge. The case study, then, is mainly associated with inductive analysis, holistic understandings and interpretation. Case-study reports are frequently presented as thick descriptions, 'so that readers can vicariously experience these happenings, and draw their own conclusions' (Stake 1994: 243). The emphasis, therefore, is on representing the case as a bounded system rather than on generalizations and predictions (Stake 1994; Yin 1994; Gomm *et al.* 2000). Generalization is difficult because the unit of analysis (the case) may not be replicable, and because participants

(and the interests within the case) may not be typical of broader cases or of the population more widely (Gomm *et al.* 2000). However, Hammersley and Gomm (2000) argue that some ‘naturalistic generalisation’ may be possible, a sort of non-scientific generalization based on the notion of transferability of findings to other cases on the basis of ‘fit’. Cronback (cited in Gomm *et al.* 2000) suggests that it is possible to develop working hypotheses from one case. Furthermore, even within a single case study, researchers tend to draw intra-case generalizations.

My aim then is to represent the case as authentically as possible in its own terms - primarily in terms of what participants⁴⁵ reveal about their experiences of it⁴⁶. Following Stake (1994: 242) I hold to the view that an ‘[i]llustration as to how the phenomenon occurs in the circumstances of the particular exemplar can be valued and trustworthy knowledge’. In this way, I can make modest knowledge claims.

In my case...

Millar (1983: 119) suggests that researchers need to outline the ‘anatomy’ of their case – basically what it is about and the social context it rests within. It is to that task that I now turn. The case is an RPL pilot in a South African university in 1997-8, a time of significant change and reform across the higher education sector⁴⁷. I shall retain some degree of anonymity by referring to the site as ‘the university’⁴⁸. In the terms used to describe educational institutions under apartheid, it is a historically white university, in the liberal English rather than Afrikaans

⁴⁵ The RPL candidates, the co-RPL facilitator, and academics in the department who were involved in some capacity.

⁴⁶ I say ‘primarily’ because I use documentary data for triangulation purposes.

⁴⁷ As outlined in the Introduction.

⁴⁸ Even though many readers (particularly South African readers) will be able to identify it, because of the relatively small number of universities in South Africa and their very clear defining features.

tradition. It is an old university, established in the early 19th century. It is a large institution with approaching 20,000 students and a strong research identity.

The site for my research is a department within the university which I shall call 'the department'. The department was established in the early 1970s with the appointment of a Chair, and one of its main concerns was to develop pre- and post-graduate level programmes for educators of adults working in non-formal adult education. The department also hosted a changing range of externally-funded research projects. The research project that I coordinated fell into this category. As discussed in the Subject Review, the second phase of that project involved empirical work piloting models of RPL in two different contexts. The department agreed to be one of the contexts and so as well as hosting the project it was also a subject of the research. An RPL process was negotiated, designed and implemented with the aim of accessing a cohort of experienced adult educators without degrees to a two-year, part-time post-graduate level diploma course – hereafter called 'the diploma'.

The RPL pilot was physically located in the university. It consisted of a one-day orientation workshop, individual consultations and a four-day programme. This amounted to about thirty hours of contact time and candidates were expected to spend the same amount of time in private work. Several meetings and a departmental workshop were held during the design and negotiation phases. All of the academics in the department except one were involved in some way. Ten potential RPL candidates attended the one-day orientation workshop. Seven of these continued into the RPL process. The four-day RPL programme took place over two weekends. The pilot was facilitated by a colleague from the department and myself.

The seven RPL candidates were all involved in my PhD research, as was the co-facilitator of RPL. I interviewed only those academics who had been involved in the negotiation and/or design and/or implementation of the RPL pilot in *more than one* capacity. The reason for this purposeful sampling was the likelihood that those who were most involved would provide the most important information in relation to my research questions.

Reflexive issues involved in a case study of my own practice

As Millar (1983) points out, the case study requires the researcher to declare his/her presence. I was working in various capacities. First, as the co-ordinator of the RPL research project. Secondly, as an academic in the department concerned. Thirdly, I was centrally involved in the negotiation and design of the RPL process. Fourthly, I was a co-facilitator of the RPL process. Now, finally, I am the researcher looking back over all of these activities. Both the benefits and drawbacks of researching one's own practice seem to lie in the fact that one is 'involved already'. On the benefit side, I had ready access to documentary data and the trust of the people within the case. The downside was that I perhaps knew too much or knew more experientially than was contained in the data. At times it has been hard to strike a balance between relying on the data and allowing my analysis and interpretation to be influenced by what I 'just knew' as a result of being there.

Instruments and methods of data collection

The study drew on documentary and interview data. The two types of data were selected in order to develop as a full a picture as possible of the case and the site.

Documentary data are most contemporaneous with the actual pilot and, as public documents, provide a counter-balance to the reflective and private nature of interview data⁴⁹. I drew some parameters around the documentary data I used, and selected what was most proximate to the pilot time period. I balanced this against the need to use as wide a range of documentary data as possible for triangulation purposes. The final selection of documentary data was as follows:

- extracts from project funding proposals, reports and papers;
- notes from meetings and a workshop held in the department;
- memos within the department;
- extracts from departmental documentation pertaining to teaching programmes;
- an agreement drawn up between the department and the project to set operating parameters for the pilot;
- a set of criteria devised by the project staff in collaboration with departmental staff to guide assessment of candidates' prior learning;
- RPL 'curriculum' materials;
- candidates' portfolios;

The project funder gave written permission to use project materials towards my PhD. I asked permission from members of the department to use internal departmental documentation. I said that I would assume permission was granted unless I heard otherwise. I did not hear otherwise. I made an email request to each candidate regarding using their portfolios as data.

Interview data and interviews are viewed very differently in different paradigms. The 'posture' I adopted in my philosophical position was hermeneutic in this regard. In this frame,

⁴⁹ And a means of ensuring I met my coherence validity criterion.

interviews are likely to be 'based on how researcher and subjects interpret the world and attempt to merge their horizons of meaning' (Silverman 2000: 33)⁵⁰. My main reason for choosing interviews was my ongoing interest in the quality of the discussions that had previously taken place within the department. Given the constructionist parts of my philosophical position, I wanted access to stories about the RPL pilot as a basis for developing my own account of that particular social reality. The poststructuralist view that interviews are dubious means for accessing past events (because interviewees simply reframe events discursively and reposition themselves accordingly) is militated against by having documentary as well as interview data.

I drew on some 'prior' interview data. These were semi-structured interviews conducted with each of the seven RPL candidates by the RPL co-facilitator four months after the RPL process. Their purpose was to find out how the ex-candidates were faring and to ask them to reflect on the RPL pilot. They were also asked which particular aspects of their prior experiential knowledge they thought had contributed to their 'success' or otherwise. After some theme analysis of the data, the co-facilitator and I held a group focus meeting to which all of the ex-candidates were invited (in August 1998). Emergent findings were presented to them for comment. The data from the group focus interview gained in richness on account of the multiplier effect of opinions and views.

The prior data overlapped to a significant degree with my PhD research questions, possibly because my interests at that time anticipated those of the PhD. What is particularly significant about the prior data are their capacity to act as a comparator with data gathered specifically for the PhD almost three years later, enabling me to triangulate the two sets of data and also to

⁵⁰ Silverman concedes that this is an ambitious task and that descriptive analysis might be a more reachable goal.

refer the candidates to things they had raised earlier. I was interested to see the extent to which candidates' stories did or didn't change over time. The prior data therefore enhances the coherence of my research⁵¹.

In gathering 'new' PhD interview data and extending the interviews to academics and the RPL co-facilitator, I considered the major types of qualitative research interviews. Issues of power and control are immanent in all types, most explicitly so in the structured type. Given my situatedness and insider status within this research, any interview approach that placed me in the position of detached questioner would be uncharacteristic. Life in the research project and in the department was debate and discussion-orientated. There were no methodological grounds for me to break from previous ways of working and interacting.

I was aware that focus groups are useful for exploring ideas at the beginning of research, but given that I was building on prior experience and prior data, this did not seem to be an issue for me. Moreover, power dynamics in a group focus interview (containing both academics and candidates) would, I felt, inhibit rather than stimulate both sides. Yet I could find no justifiable reason for conducting two group-focus sessions, given that my research interests were the same for both groups. Consequently, I opted for individual interviews, with the option of reconsidering the group-focus idea as a follow-up possibility to check or develop ideas raised by individuals.

My choice, then, was between semi-structured and unstructured interviews. It is argued that unstructured interviews are better for engaging with complexity. However, I opted for a loosely semi-structured format. The reasons for this were twofold. First, I knew all the people

⁵¹ My second validity criterion.

and it would have been very easy for unstructured interviews to become very wide-ranging, indeed off the point. Secondly, I was in a junior relationship to some of my academic colleagues and that made me want to take charge formally of the agenda. Again, I saw no particular reason to differentiate between interviews with candidates and interviews with academics, and so I opted for a semi-structured approach for both.

My style followed Berg (1995: 61), involving 'the implementation of a number of pre-determined questions and/or special topics' asked of each interviewee, allowing space for digression and for probing beyond the boundaries of the prepared questions. I was aware that the interviews placed substantial power in my hands and tried to militate against this (and the unnaturalness of the situation) in the way I framed the interviews, by going to interviewees' places of work or homes (their choice) and by sending everyone an outline of the purpose and content of the interview beforehand i.e. by sharing some of my script with them.

Collecting the data

I conducted interviews between September 2000 and February 2001⁵², having alerted interviewees to the possibility some months before. This was three years after the RPL process. I spent my period 'in the field' planning, conducting and transcribing the interviews, as well as undertaking some preliminary data analysis and making further contact with each interviewee in order to a) check the transcript and b) follow up some interesting and pertinent individual issues.

⁵² Seven ex-candidates, five academics and the co-facilitator of the RPL process – a total of thirteen interviews (together with the seven 'prior' interviews with the candidates and the group focus interview).

I developed three different interview schedules, one for candidates, one for academics and one for the co-facilitator, and an aide memoire of prompts (Appendix A). In my Fieldwork Report (6 March 2001), I reported how hard it was to sustain boundaries between knowledge, pedagogy, power and identity in terms of devising interview questions. I spent a lot of time (possibly too much) trying to weave Foucauldian and Bernsteinian-related ideas into my prompts. This was perhaps unnecessary at that point in time, being more of an issue for analysis and interpretation⁵³. I noted (in the same report) that, after drafting and redrafting schedules, I kept returning to the same questions and order of questions, and so decided to go with what I had at that point.

In addition to interview schedules and the aide memoire of prompts, I produced a 'position statement' (Appendix B), emailed to each interviewee as part of setting up the interviews. The statement gave an indication of the sorts of questions I would be asking and 'where I was coming from' with the research. In accordance with the social constructionist features of my philosophical framework, I stressed that I was concerned with 'everyone's version of the particular social reality' and with 'the meanings each person accorded to the practice'. I informed the interviewees that I saw the interviews as dialogue/discussion. I gave an idea of how long the interview would last and requested permission to tape record. I also informed them that neither institution nor individuals would be directly identifiable in the final thesis. A couple of the interviewees said that my introductory contact gave them 'just enough to get them thinking'. One academic said that he would need some prompting 'about those finely focused questions'⁵⁴. My general aim was to provide a framework for the interviewees to speak as freely as possible and in their own terms about my research concerns.

⁵³ There was also an imbalance, in that Foucault's concepts informed the interviews more than Bernsteinian ones.

⁵⁴ Email correspondence 28/02/01.

The candidates were asked about themselves and knowledge, pedagogy, identity and power issues at each of three stages of the RPL process (on entry, during, at the end). They were also given an opportunity to reflect on these issues in relation to other RPL candidates and to identify a 'critical moment' for themselves. At the end of each interview, I raised any issues I had identified from the 'prior' data. The departmental academics were asked about the roles they had played in the RPL pilot (their involvement was mainly at the level of negotiation, design and assessment). For each 'involvement', they were invited to talk about what they found particularly significant regarding knowledge, pedagogy, power and identity. They were asked to reflect upon how they saw themselves in the process compared with other academics, and to comment on their sense of the candidates going through the process. As with the candidates, they were invited to identify 'critical moments' and to comment on what they considered to be the overall effect of RPL in the department. The co-facilitator of RPL was involved in negotiation, design, implementation and assessment. She was invited to comment on knowledge, pedagogy, identity and power issues at each stage. Critical moments were again focused on, as well as thoughts about others in the process⁵⁵. Each interview ended with an opportunity for interviewees to ask me questions.

Given my familiarity with the interviewees, gaining access was not a problem. Everyone I approached agreed to be interviewed. The first interview with a member of each cohort acted as a pilot to check whether the schedule 'worked'. Each interview began with an informal chat, usually over tea or coffee. I reiterated my research interests and reasons for the interview. In the candidate interviews, I tended to play down my status. The interviews with the academics tended to reflect the status positions within the department. I opened the semi-structured interview with a broad first question to help to refresh memories about the RPL

⁵⁵ I saw talking about each other as a form of triangulation.

process, and the activities and positions within it. I then moved through the more structured questions, using my prompts and checking meanings with interviewees as necessary.

Wherever possible I endeavoured to ask additional probing questions and to seek clarification from the interviewees by asking, 'Are you saying that...?' No two interviews were the same in form. At times it felt appropriate to move through the questions in a different order. There was no need that I could see to ensure consistency between interviews. I took sparse notes, sometimes just to vary the face-to-face modality.

In order to meet my plausibility criterion, each interviewee received a copy of their transcript and was asked to 'add, correct, clarify'⁵⁶. At the same time, I raised queries of my own and analytical 'hunches' that were beginning to emerge (generally and in relation to individuals) for comment. Each interviewee responded to their transcript in some way, either by email or phone, but not all responded to the analytical hunches. One person said, 'I can almost hear myself breathing in the text – it is so exact'⁵⁷. Another said that he had nothing more to add, 'Like Pharoah, who when he had spoken, had spoken'⁵⁸. When checking the transcripts, I suggested to the interviewees that I would like to share some of my analysis with them at some future time (to further meet the plausibility criterion⁵⁹).

⁵⁶ Extract from covering email sent in February 2001.

⁵⁷ Email correspondence 8/02/01.

⁵⁸ Email correspondence 13/02/01.

⁵⁹ Admittedly, this is a sort of consensual validity open to critique from poststructuralists for wielding more power on account of the plausibility it constructs. Moreover, I am aware that a positive response from an interviewee does not necessarily amount to plausibility. It may be that I offered an account which was cleverly consonant with their image of themselves.

Reflexive issues in data collection

Learning about rival paradigmatic camps and conceptual frameworks was no preparation for field work, as I found. Given the essentially practical character of the research process, there was a tendency to act without always referencing back to one's philosophical bases.

Power issues came to the fore in the interviews in various ways. For example, I felt more comfortable (powerful?) interviewing the candidates than I did interviewing my colleagues, although there was not a clear divide on this. Who was performing for whom? Or, as Berg (1995: 82) puts it, even though the interviewer is 'official choreographer', both sides are performing. When I was interviewing some of my senior colleagues, I felt like the junior lecturer in the department, and they I am sure felt their seniority in the usual ways. This asymmetrical power relationship was sometimes more familiar than the adoption of the 'researcher position' with colleagues who shared a similar departmental status to my own, and who tended to be closer friends. In addition, there was the issue of empathy, in that as researcher I was obviously closer to some interviewees than others.

As Scott and Usher (1999) point out, power relations form an essential backdrop to interview responses. Inter-personal relationships were indeed interesting, and different in each interview. As interviewer, I was involved in constructing interview dialogues, even though I tried not to. Far from being objective, all manner of subjective interactions were going on. As Berg (1995: 80) puts it, '[t]hroughout the interview process, the interviewer and the interviewee simultaneously send and receive messages on both nonverbal and verbal channels', including body gestures, facial grimaces, expressions of discomfort, pauses, and so on. The interviews also seemed to occasion a kind of exchange or gifting process. Senior academics offered me

advice about my PhD. Some candidates wanted information and advice in exchange for their interview. Most candidates were worried that they might not be giving me what I wanted, with such comments as 'I don't know whether that's helpful' or 'I hope that's been helpful'. I picked up a sense of the candidates wanting to give something back to me as a result of being 'beneficiaries' of RPL. This might have skewed the data in one of (at least) two ways. Either candidates presented overly favourable views about RPL or mounted 'helpful' critiques of it, drawing on their developing academic identities.

I had a sense that interviewees (in the main) told me their stories irrespective of my questions. As Scheurich (1997: 71) says, [i]nterviewees do not simply go along with the researcher's program, even if it is structured rather than an open one...they can often control some or part of the interview...they push against or resist...goals... intentions...question...meanings'. Mostly, I let this happen because of my interest in perspectives and understandings. If I sensed avoidance, I brought the interviewee back to the question, to check that I was not losing information necessary to the study.

My experience of interviewing raised a range of issues many, of which remained with me in an unresolved way until well into the data analysis stage. The central issue is the value of interview data to my research questions. Were interviews actually the best vehicle for talking about what happened to knowledge or, for that matter, how power circulated? As Silverman (2000: 36) puts it:

If you are interested in, say, what happens in school classrooms, should you be using interviews as your major source of data...couldn't you observe what people do there instead of asking them what they think about it? Or gather documents...Of course, you may still want to

do an interview study. But whatever your methods you will need to justify it and show that you have thought through the practical and analytical issues involved in your choice.

If I had been using a fresh case study for my research, I would agree with Silverman that observation would have been a very useful adjunct, if not first-line approach. That way, I could have seen what people did as well as heard them reflecting on it from a distance. There are, however, several factors that militate against a negative view of the assembled data. First, much of the documentary data used is very detailed and explicit about pedagogic processes, and was corroborated by departmental staff *at the time of the pilot*. Secondly, I am not relying on one set of interviews conducted on one occasion, but have two sets together with a group focus interview.

There is a complex temporal dimension to my data gathering (and analysis). As mentioned, documentary data is contemporaneous with the actual pilot. The first interviews with the ex-candidates took place four months after RPL, when they had all 'moved on'. These interviews were therefore retrospective accounts, inevitably infused with memories of 'successes' or 'failures'. This would have been unavoidable even if the interviews had been concurrent (albeit to a lesser extent). All data is mediated in some way: there is no pure data. The second candidate interviews generated reflections from a greater distance (approximately three years) and also reflections on the previous reflections. I attempted to draw attention to changes in the nature of individuals' recollections and identity over time, the most obvious characteristic being a growing academic identity⁶⁰.

⁶⁰ Or in poststructuralist terms, a different discursive location and subjectivity.

There is a hermeneutic dimension in the layers of interpretation. With regard to candidates' portfolios, for example, these were from the outset reflections on, and interpretations of, prior experiential knowledge in writing, which I in turn attempt to reinterpret. Layers of interpretation present benefits as well as difficulties. There is the benefit of time allowing a fuller description and greater insights to emerge. On the other hand, elapsed time may shape recall and remembering in various ways and may serve to fix certain things in interviewees' minds in particular ways. I have tried to keep abreast of these issues in my data analysis.

Presentation of the data

Interviews were transcribed. I did not use any particular transcribing strategy (such as would be required for linguistic analysis). I kept as close as possible to the data but was aware that I was editing out the 'juice of the lived experience' (Scheurich 1997: 63), much of the humour, personalities, sub-text and intertextuality. Analysis began at the transcription stage, and my first conscious awareness was of the richness of the data for the purposes of my enquiry.

Some methodologists advise treating documentary data differently from interview data. I decided to treat both types of data in the same way ('as data'). There seemed to be an equal spread of documentary and interview data across each aspect of my study (i.e. the negotiation, design and implementation of RPL and across knowledge, pedagogy, identity and power).

Coding and data reduction

Immediately after transcribing the interview data, I typologised it. This involved creating a large grid (24 pieces of A4 paper) onto which I projected the content of the interviews. Across

the top of this grid were my categories of knowledge, pedagogy, power and identity as evidenced within various time periods of (and activities within) the RPL process ('before the pilot' 'inside the pilot' 'beyond the pilot boundary' etc.). Down the side of the grid was each interviewee. As my supervisors put it, this was a way of 'clocking' the data which although not systematic analysis, did allow patterns to emerge.

My pre-theory played a large part in how I handled the data and the many problems I had. I had convinced myself of the need to do coding 'properly' and this came to mean scientifically. I had managed to get to masters level without what I considered to be a firm basis or training in research methodology. Yet I was also interested in poststructuralism. With hindsight, I can see the problems this caused. In embracing a partly poststructuralist stance, I expected myself to problematise and disturb what I did not fully understand. It was only later that I recognised my structuralist tendencies. It took me many months and many failed attempts to get to grips with data analysis. I was, quite frankly, lost. The following extract from one of my reports⁶¹ captures some of the dilemma:

I had difficulty getting going with this. I was very confused about the nature of the boundaries between theme analysis and discourse analysis. I procrastinated and read around and started to investigate Atlas-ti software⁶²... I devised countless coding schemas and got very confused about all of the theoretical concepts floating around in my head as well as themes emerging in a grounded way from the data. Deciding what level of generality to go for with coding was hard. I also found the boundary between coding and interpretation hard to hold i.e. resisting the temptation to 'jump to (interpretative) conclusions'.

⁶¹ Report for 3rd Party Monitoring – May 02.

⁶² My own conclusions about Atlas-ti are that it is very useful for data organisation/reduction, but less so for analysis/interpretation. Mastering the technology is very time-consuming, and once that is achieved it tends to drive the analytical process. Moreover, its internal search tools are weak.

I developed and experimented with eight different coding schemas for reducing my data. I did not fully appreciate that there was no 'right way' to do this. Furthermore, I could not keep track of the intuitive leaps I was making, the wrong turns, back-tracking and following of hunches. Sometimes these happened in very quick succession and I was always conscious of losing the gestalt of the data. The book I found most useful with regard to coding and data reduction was Coffey and Atkinson (1996⁶³). It became my aide memoire. The following guidance on coding was particularly helpful to me:

Note the topic, not the *content*. When you look at a piece of data, ask yourself, 'What is this *about*?' Don't pay attention yet to *what* is said, i.e., to the substance of the statement; you will deal with this at a later stage (Tesch in Coffey and Atkinson 1996: 169).

The idea of topics moved me forward and, eventually, I found a coding schema that 'held' (Extract as Appendix C). With hindsight I can see this was part of the research process, but at the time it was a huge problem. My specific problem was that I got tense and did not go with the flow and messiness and the necessarily provisional nature of working with data. Finally, I coded all my data in terms of: 'person concerned or being spoken about' + 'location in the RPL process – before, during or after' + 'whether the data were mostly about knowledge, pedagogy, power or identity' + anything else I could say about the piece of the data under scrutiny (usually in the form of an Atlas-ti analytic memo). Example codes would be 'knowledge in/of the department', 'candidates' identity on entering the pilot', and so on. I tagged all data extracts with the name of the person to whom they referred. The codes were of various sizes and shapes. This was a crude (close to the data) reduction and organisation exercise, but it did get me through my blockages. The fact that I did not involve any other researcher in testing my coding system, or the way I was applying it, is perhaps a threat to my

⁶³ The chapter on 'Varieties of data and varieties of analysis'.

dependability quality criterion⁶⁴. In mitigation, I carefully honed codes to the point where they were as unambiguous as possible.

Modes of, and procedures for, data analysis and interpretation

In this section I identify and discuss data analysis processes and provide retrospective accounts of how data were examined and synthesized. I have already located my approach as broadly interpretive with influences from structuralism and poststructuralism. Holstein and Gubrium (2000: 267) offer a 'definition' of interpretive practice:

Interpretive practice can be understood to involve the articulation of publicly recognised structures, categories, or images with aspects of experience in ways that accountably produce broadly recognizable instances of the objects or events so categorised. David Silverman sees this practical linkage of interpretive structure and 'artfulness' as a way of establishing a middle ground between such polar sociological extremes as so-called macro and micro forms of analysis...

The above definition is very succinct, but it did not give me a method of analysis.

Consequently, recovering from the coding dilemma was not the end of my problems. I did not know what to do with the coded and categorised data. For some time, I tried to work the Bernsteinian and Foucauldian concepts directly into the categorised data. This was unsuccessful because there was too much of a gap between the data and the theory. It seems I was caught in the classic trap of obscuring the data with the theoretical framework and then becoming submerged in the specifics of the data. Moss (1996), following Bernstein, attributes the former to fixing an analytic language too soon and ignoring the data, and the latter to delay

⁶⁴ And also a centralisation of power and control.

in pulling back from the data and getting overwhelmed by it. Like Moss, I decided to work in an inductive, grounded, thematic way with the *content* of the categorised data in order to find patterns within them. I followed Tesch (cited in Coffey and Atkinson 1996: 205): 'In dealing with their data, qualitative researchers 'search' for themes, and they 'find' themes, or they 'extract' 'recognise' or 'identify' them. Most often, however, themes are said to 'emerge'...' ⁶⁵

Progressing from category to theme made me feel grounded in the data. As a typologist, once I had worked out what I was doing, I was very comfortable making and mapping patterns and themes from the categorised data and relating those themes across categories. In some ways, the data inevitably became decontextualised as they were disaggregated and reaggregated (Scheurich 1997: 62). An extract from my research diary (02/07/01) captures this process: 'The way that I am bridging the theory-data gap is by starting with grounded theory⁶⁶ – letting the data speak – to establish patterns etc. Then working concepts through that analysis to support interpretation...' The only drawback of this is in terms of my coherence quality criterion, in that I used *only* theme analysis at this point.

The end of a period of working in the above way coincided with a visit to South Africa where I made contact with interviewees and fed back some of my preliminary analysis. Following Stake (1994: 244) I was keen to ensure that the value of my research did not 'outweigh injury to a person exposed'. Two candidate interviewees expressed concerns about feeling personally and/or professionally exposed in the analysis. Two other candidates expressed enthusiasm for the preliminary analysis, saying that for them it was 'spot on'. A further two candidates found the analysis 'interesting'. An academic interviewee suggested that my analysis was not fully worked up and made some suggestions accordingly. Two other academics responded by

⁶⁵ In a poststructuralist view, they would 'emerge' from the heads of the researcher rather than from the data.

⁶⁶ In retrospect, I was not doing grounded theorising in the Glassner and Strauss sense, but theme analysis.

saying that my accounts 'resonated' and triggered memories. One academic felt that I needed more contextual data and so equipped me accordingly. All told, ten of the thirteen interviewees responded. I found this to be a nerve-racking but fruitful exercise in establishing the plausibility of my analysis at a relatively early stage.

Reflexive issues regarding theme analysis

Doing theme analysis led me (unwittingly) to afford particular status to data. Although I had adopted a view of language as both referential and constitutive, in practice the former seemed to dominate and language became a transparent medium in which participants' realities were unambiguously expressed. This seems to be a common problem: researchers (and methodologists) say one thing and act on the basis of the other - that is, treat data as sacrosanct. The reflexive point was/is how easy it is to drift into particular positions. Flowing from this, did I see my data as reports of reality or as constructions of reality or as interviewees' interpretive procedures in action? The same issue applies to the interviewees: did they see themselves as telling me about reality or as constructing realities (or interpretive versions of them) for me?

There is a price to pay for accepting interview data at face value. First, the view that what is given to the senses and processed by the brain simply represents the world is characteristic of naïve realism. Secondly, it assumes that common-sense knowledge and common-sense views are inherently valid. As sociologists argue, lay accounts cannot do the work of sociological explanation: common sense is not sociology and more 'objective' data might contradict the interviewees' stories. Scott and Usher (1996b: 66) capture the complex status of data in the following:

It is therefore not possible to argue that their accounts of their intentions relate precisely to what caused those actors to behave in the way they did, because first, the chronological sequence of events makes this impossible; and second, since they are likely to be post-hoc rationalizations, they do not co-exist in a simple, naming relationship with the actions they seek to describe...

However, it remains important to do justice to interviewees' accounts; to find a position on the boundary between a social constructionist stance which aims to apprehend the worlds of others, and essentialising interviewees' voices. I took the view that it is possible to view accounts as informed statements. After all, in my case the interviews were reflexive stories. I chose therefore to treat the data as informed reflexive statement (or 'real social construction'): to accord them more than narrative status. In that way I could analyse the patterned character of participants' portrayals whilst also (where appropriate) drawing attention to its constructed nature, to influences that may have been exerted on it, and to the worlds and practices from which it arose. The fact that the documentary data (although themselves a social construction that tended to be taken literally) were at least a different sort of account also acted to offset essentialism. These are the mechanisms I used to militate against misleading direct correspondence theories and to maintain my philosophical posture of part-realist and part-social constructivist. But I remained aware that my position on the above boundary was an uneasy one.

Three other reflexive issues are noteworthy. First, in the process of theme analysis I found myself needing to be reflexive about the way in which I was 'using' the accounts and private information of others as a basis for my own PhD story and (I hoped) professional

advancement⁶⁷. I offset this by providing feedback and by formally expressing my gratitude in the thesis 'acknowledgements'. Secondly, I consciously tried to accord equal status to all of the interviewees' data and to avoid the assumption that the people in the highest status positions gave more credible accounts than others. During the theme analysis, I noted that data from academics were already interpretations at high levels of academic sophistication. I needed to adopt a kind of archaeological analytical approach to this, whereby I unpicked the nature of the discourses at work. Finally, a difficulty mentioned earlier in relation to researching my own practice remained. It took me a long time to make the familiar strange, to get beyond what I 'just knew' about the people and the RPL event so as to be challenged by the data. That really only started to happen at the level of interpretation, to which I now turn.

Interpretation

The boundary between data analysis and interpretation is generally taken to be blurred, but the latter is usually seen as being at a different level. It is here that the researcher moves away from the field and the data and engages more fully with ideas in the conceptual framework. As Coffey and Atkinson (quoted in Silverman 2000: 142) put it, '[i]nterpretation involves the transcendence of "factual" data and cautious analysis of what is to be made of them'.

Methodologists see it as the point where intuition and tacit skills come to the fore. It cannot be defined by methodological rule, being more art than method. Research questions come into sharp focus.

There was quite a firm line between analysis and interpretation for me because the latter was driven by explicit theory. I laminated my interpretation on to my analysis in an abductive way.

⁶⁷ There was also a discomfort regarding 'surveillance' in relation to the ex-RPL candidates. They had been the subjects of the RPL research and were now involved in this piece of research.

The following extract from my research diary⁶⁸ captures the essence of this process: ‘When ‘analysis’ goes well, I make a map of what the data are saying (Step 1 – grounded) and then see what the [theoretical] concepts add to that (Step 2 – conceptual/theory-led). NB There has to be scope for disagreement between the two...’ The last point in the quotation is interesting because it points to two important aspects of interpretation: that there may be findings that cannot be illuminated by theories (negative instances); and that the data might refute the theory, and therefore have shortcomings.

I experienced interpretation as the most creative, imaginative and intellectual part of the research process because of the insights that were possible on the basis of the routine analytical processes that had preceded it. At that point, I had moved beyond consensus-building and the meanings given by participants. It was the researcher’s theoretical voice that was now the strongest, although that voice was firmly grounded in the meanings of others. There was a sense of relief (as well as a degree of reflexivity) about having arrived at last at some modest knowledge claims.

Presentation of the data analysis and interpretation

As Coffey and Atkinson (1996: 183) state, the researcher as writer needs to: ‘plan some sort of arrangement that will accommodate sections that are more broadly descriptive, sections that are more formally analytical, and sections that are interpretive discussions against theory’. The following two chapters attempt to balance description, analysis and interpretation. Each begins with descriptive analysis. The analytic component is presented as ‘thick description’. I was conscious of needing to work from *all* of the data, and of not selecting bits that fitted emergent

⁶⁸ 3 March 2002.

arguments. I tried to strike a balance between too many quotations, in which case the direction and thinking of the analysis tend to be obscured, and too few, in which case flavour, interest and idiosyncrasy are lessened or lost⁶⁹. Thereafter, I offer an abductive interpretative dimension exploring the findings against theory.

As argued in the Conceptual Research Framework chapter, I am not attempting a synthesis of Bernstein's and Foucault's work. Central organising principles for Bernstein are knowledge and pedagogy. Power and (particularly pedagogic) identities and consciousness revolve these conceptualisations. Central organising principles for Foucault are power and identity (and subjectivity-subjection). Knowledge and pedagogy and identity revolve around these conceptualisations. This patterning forms the overall shape of my conceptual framework. Methodologically, I adopt the ontological, epistemological and methodological 'posture' argued for in chapter three, with reflexive commentaries as necessary.

References to my 'prior' work in RPL have been made in the Introduction, Subject Review and Research Design chapters. What follows is a brief resume to frame the data analysis. The RPL project under consideration was a joint venture between a South African research council and two higher education institutions. There were two main phases. Phase one⁷⁰ involved theoretical work, commissioning international case studies and situational analyses in two fields where pilots were to be developed: adult educator development and the professional development of nurses. Phase two⁷¹ was about elaborating theory through practice. The site chosen for negotiating, designing and implementing an RPL pilot with regard to the

⁶⁹ I anonymise the quotations.

⁷⁰ Which lasted for nine months – from 1 September 1996 to 31 May 1997.

⁷¹ Which lasted for ten months – from 1 June 1997 to 31 March 1998.

professional development of adult educators was the department that was hosting the project⁷². It was also the department where I had been employed since 1993. That department therefore moved from project host to pilot site. An RPL pilot was negotiated, designed and implemented with the aim of accessing a cohort of experienced adult educators without degrees⁷³ to a two-year, part-time, post-graduate level diploma course⁷⁴.

The pilot was physically located in the university⁷⁵. It consisted of a one-day orientation workshop, individual consultations and a four-day programme. This amounted to about thirty hours of contact time and candidates were expected to spend the same amount of time in private study. Several meetings and a departmental workshop were held during the design and negotiation phases. Ten potential RPL candidates attended the one-day orientation workshop. Seven of these continued into the RPL process. The four-day RPL programme took place over two weekends. The pilot was facilitated by a colleague from the department and myself.

The analysis is organised chronologically, in two chapters. First, knowledge, pedagogy, power and identity in the *negotiation and initial design* of the pilot. At this point in time, issues of power and identity were uppermost, and so I draw on Foucauldian concepts. Secondly, knowledge, pedagogy, power and identity in the *curriculum design*⁷⁶ and implementation of the pilot. Here, knowledge and pedagogy were uppermost, and so I draw on Bernstein's concepts.

⁷² Referred to as 'the department'.

⁷³ 'Matriculation plus three years higher education' was the formal entry requirement except for the admission of a few students who had graduated very successfully from the department's two-year part-time certificate programme.

⁷⁴ Referred to as 'the diploma'.

⁷⁵ Referred to as 'the university'.

⁷⁶ I am using the term 'curriculum' to apply to any planned learning event.

I have developed a matrix covering the various components of analysis across the two chapters
(to be read downwards):

<u>Subjects</u>	<u>Data</u>	<u>Questions</u>	<u>Phases</u>	<u>Contexts</u>
<i>Academics</i>	Interview data	Knowledge	Negotiation and initial design of pilot	The RPL pilot
<i>RPL candidates</i>	Documentary data	Pedagogy	Curriculum design and implementation of pilot	The RPL project
<i>RPL facilitators</i>		Power		The department
		Identity		The university

Each chapter is organised by way of a descriptive and thematic analysis of the data (findings)
leading to an abductive interpretative dimension exploring the findings against theory.

CHAPTER SIX:

FOUCAULDIAN ANALYSIS OF KNOWLEDGE, PEDAGOGY, POWER AND IDENTITY IN THE NEGOTIATION AND INITIAL DESIGN OF THE RPL PILOT

Introduction

This analysis operationalises the following theoretically-informed lines of enquiry:

- How does power circulate in and around RPL? With what power-effects?
- What discourses characterise the process and the context? With what effects?
- What understandings of the self are at work in and around RPL? What subjectivities are encouraged and how are these taken up?
- What role does subjugated knowledge play in this RPL process?

There are six parts to the chapter, organised loosely chronologically:

1. The department.
2. The department and the RPL project.
3. The RPL project.
4. The department and the RPL pilot.
5. A departmental workshop on the RPL pilot.
6. The department and the RPL pilot (continued).

Analysis draws predominantly on interviews with academics in the department (undertaken approximately three years after the actual RPL pilot) and on relevant documentary data.

Documentary data are:

- extracts from project funding proposals, reports and papers;
- notes from meetings and a workshop held in the department;
- memos within the department;
- extracts from departmental documentation pertaining to the teaching programme;
- an agreement drawn up between the department and the project to set operating parameters for the pilot;
- a set of criteria devised by the project staff in collaboration with departmental staff to guide assessment of candidates' prior learning.

The department

There were eleven academics in the department at the time of the RPL pilot – a combination of tenured, contract and project staff. I introduce each person as they appear in the analysis⁷⁷.

Discourse

The two most senior academics in the department – the professor and chair (Robert) and the associate professor (James) speak most directly and 'synthetically' about the nature of the

⁷⁷ Not all of them appear.

‘departmental discourse.’^{78 79} Both refer to *liberal*: ‘I’m saying the liberal thing is embedded and taken for given , that sense of social responsibility, very modernist in a powerful way’ (Robert) and, ‘but *we*⁸⁰ were still, despite all of that you see, we were still liberals. We were liberal, liberal, liberal – from day one to day end’ (James). Robert’s reference to modernism suggests a conscious positioning. In the Introduction, I addressed how ‘liberal’ was understood in the neo-Marxist sociology of education in South Africa, especially in the eighties. It was liberalism with ‘right’ and ‘left’ elements. The former was viewed as paternalistic (from a radical position). The latter was characterised by critical engagement at a distance. *The department* falls into the latter camp:

...*the department* was sceptical about a social activist role...It said it had *university* work to do during the seventies and eighties. It wasn’t going to imitate a community organisation. That was a difficult thing for me to hold. One lost a lot of immediate credibility out there. But at the same time organisations sent their workers to us throughout the eighties in big numbers – ‘because we provided a space for critique, and maybe for individuals to have a liberal education of some kind (Robert).

The discourse of left-liberalism leans backwards in a radical direction however. For James, ‘emancipation’ and ‘community development’ are part of its archaeology. These are terms that echo something earlier, suggesting something now ‘buried’ but part of a ‘bigger’ transformatory project:

⁷⁸ Some data is interviewees talking *about* discourse. Other analysis will be concerned with discourse-in-action.

⁷⁹ There is a question as to whether this direct speaking was characteristic of departmental practices or a time-effect? Is it because the department was disestablished at the end of 1998 and the interviewees can speak in the past tense therefore introducing a historico-analytical mode? Is it because the discourses are no longer active and ‘at work’? Is a version of history being created?

⁸⁰ Forthcoming analysis will consider who ‘we’ refers to. There are a number of collective references of this sort including ‘the department’ – all of which I italicise.

...buried underneath Robert and me and Martin⁸¹ and everybody is an emancipatory thing. It was bigger than all of us when we'd come into the department on that basis. Bedrock, we're about community development – might be a crass phrase...The major voice was Freire – Freire plus the church (James).

The left-liberal and historically radical elements of departmental discourse are exemplified through the discourses and social practices of the two main teaching programmes. These, in common with other university adult education departments of the time, consist of a certificate and a diploma programme.

The *certificate programme*, with its (almost) open access, recruits primarily from the ranks of community- and NGO-based educator-activists. In a departmental review of the history of this programme⁸², references are made to the changing nature of programme discourses. In the early to mid-eighties, the programme aimed to provide a 'safe space' for black educator-activists during periods of extreme repression⁸³. There was an emphasis on capacity-building, on sharing university resources with community organisations, and on theory that linked local educators into a broader community of educators, with 'echoes throughout the developing world'. This discourse clearly has strong elements of radicalism in the references to building group capacity and international solidarity.

In the late eighties, the certificate had a different co-ordinator. For him, 'the key concepts of adult education were Freirian in origin' with 'concern for the working class community' who

⁸¹ Lecturer in the department.

⁸² For purposes of anonymity I have not included the full references. I apologise to the writers concerned. Quotations are distinguishable from quotes from interview data because the latter are ascribed.

⁸³ There were differences of perspective in the department on the issue of safe spaces. According to Rosy, the certificate co-ordinator from 1992, Robert's view was more liberal than hers. Debates revolved around whether critique could and should happen in a university or in the mass movement. The radical view was the latter, but for reasons of state repression and political heavy-handedness within the movement, this was impossible during the eighties (additional data from Rosy).

had 'been sidelined by contest'. The concern was conscientisation and the legitimisation of 'alternative endowments'. After a period of care-taking, the current incumbent (Rosy) took over as co-ordinator in 1992, in a changed political context. Rosy made what she termed a 'difficult choice' about 'holding' certificate discourse in line with people's education⁸⁴. At that time, she claimed that the latter still had currency as a guide to the (re)development of the certificate programme, particularly the need for 'participants to develop a more political and contextualised approach to their role as educator'. As a labour movement activist with a history of organisational Marxism, she focuses on organisational capacity- building, based on social action and social theory. This is reflected in who is admitted to the programme, that is, 'candidates from government and industrial institutions only where their work relates closely to community-based or trade union projects'⁸⁵.

Rosy, according to Robert, was 'perfectly recruited' to co-ordinate the certificate programme: 'refreshing, intensely hard working, committed [with] powerfully modern views of the world'. Evidence suggests a comfortable fit between discourses and identities; the certificate discourse (under Rosy's stewardship) and the department's discursive history. I would argue that the certificate retains a much-valued and longstanding radical narrative within departmental discourse.

The *diploma programme* has a particularly strong discursive register, with roots (eventually) in disciplinary sociology of education. As with the certificate, rhythms of change have been influenced by events in the broader socio-political and educational context. University-based

⁸⁴ Due to the huge decline in mass social action and the lack of clarity regarding the position a future government would take on adult education, NGOs were struggling to survive in a context of rerouted donor funding. Many had to turn themselves into businesses almost overnight. Consequently there were demands for universities to provide 'survival skills' such as 'management and fundraising'.

⁸⁵ Two historically separate departmental certificates were collapsed into one on this basis.

adult education in the eighties was, as Robert put it⁸⁶, characterised by an absence of ‘the normal range of external definers of a professional curriculum to impose criteria [or] definition of professional practice’ and ‘no established theoretical knowledge that constituted “adult education” as a subject’⁸⁷. Without external definers, responsibility fell to the ‘internal definers – the staff’:

The internal definers – the staff...therefore had the opportunity to develop an entirely new curriculum. But at the same time they were engaged in a process of institutional development ...part of the deeper task of locating the work of a new department and the individuals in it within a responsible reading of an historical situation. It is not surprising, therefore, that the course was experimental and reflexive, it became the site for departmental homework of the most basic kind. And the deep reconstructive task, for the department, ran its own strange and hesitant agenda through the course itself.

This suggests diploma curriculum development set against ‘the deeper task’ of social reconstruction. As Robert writes, ‘the reason why the Diploma Course is so important to us (witness time, effort, worry, research) is that it is our major vehicle for reconstructing the role of the educator’. Embedded, then, in the reconstructive task of the eighties was the construction of a notion of ‘professional’ in an adult education context characterised by a political position of anti-professionalism.

The diploma programme passed through several incarnations before the RPL project engaged with it. The first five years or so were characterised by a central curriculum location for learner experience, in two main ways: as raw material for critical reflection and (on one

⁸⁶ The quotations that follow are from a paper, not referenced to preserve anonymity, written by one of the senior academics in the department.

⁸⁷ It is interesting to note that the diploma staff viewed adult learning as a subset of educational theory with serious ‘theoretical limitations’.

occasion) as providing the basis and resource for a social/group curriculum. As Robert put it, in 1982-3, the course rationale was 'deconstruction and reconstruction: it began with the deliberate absence of a curriculum – the task was to create it'. This was the experiment of curriculum negotiation. The idea was that the structural, cultural and institutional forces shaping all curricula were to be made visible through enactment and reflection in the form of a 'teaching conversation'. It was seen as a move against prescriptive forms of social control and learner dependency. According to Robert, 'the last thing the staff wanted to do was shape any approved educator role and induct anyone into it'. Explicit instruction and 'explicit advocacy' were consistently avoided.

This is not to say that construction of roles, instruction and induction did not happen. As Rosy points out in her interview, 'they [Robert and James] did this powerfully'. Robert and James also concede that powerful and tacit shaping happened during the 'non-prescriptive' diploma years. Despite a negotiated curriculum, staff remained in control in two highly significant and powerfully constitutive ways: first, over assessment, and secondly, over the informal discourse of the course. Given this, it could be argued (and was) that learner dependency actually increased rather than decreased.

Written documentation pertaining to those years reveals much about the tacit criteria that were shaping an ideal adult educator-student role. In Robert's own words, these were 'absurdly heroic'. On one occasion, he analysed lecturers' comments on students' assignments and found work criticised for 'over-simple theory', being too empirical, not problematising important concepts in a study, not revealing a grasp of debates, staying within common-sense views, not having a sociological grasp, not explaining anything, not making location visible, not offering social explanations of action. Where 'positive' assessment comments were made,

they seemed frequently to damn with faint praise, as in: 'succeeds as a personal report', 'small scale investigation', 'gives insights into..', 'gives evidence of having been a vehicle for personal learning', 'clear sense of an insider's common sense perceptions'. Particular qualities seemed to have been singled out for strongest praise - for example, 'it is unpretentious and honest'.

In interpreting this analytical exercise, Robert concluded (wryly) that the diploma valued students who were 'sociologists', 'philosophers' and who were 'virtuous':

...there is much coherence in our evaluative messages and it is not difficult to construct from them qualities and capacities we value. These include, first, the capacity for understanding social location. We seem to emphasise 'explanation' a great deal, grasp of structures and processes that contain, limit or run through social action. We want our students to be sociologists. They include, too, asking questions that expand and problematise meanings of personal action, including questions about language. We want our students to be philosophers. And they include acting in ways that are honest, self-aware and disciplined by commitment. We want our students to be virtuous.

'Social location', 'explanation' and 'action' came strongly to the fore. In acknowledging the scope and scale of these demands, Robert conceded that '[t]hese are heavy burdens to shoulder. Perhaps a part-time professional course is not the framework to contain them properly'. It was the tacit nature of the criteria that led the co-ordinators to 'come clean' about the 'particular kind of reconstructive task' with which they were engaged. Data from James's interview corroborates the notion of a transition in diploma discourse in the mid-eighties. He sees the 'coming clean' as a 'movement' in a formal and academic direction. This move

coincided with the rise of people's education in civil society, and the debates about how closely universities should align to this. James says:

One thing that made us think that [the notion of experience] was not enough was because it had become common property. It was the stock in trade of UDF activism...and therefore was out and about and at work and was insufficiently academic to meet another set of requirements which we had to meet.

This confirms the view of left-liberalism at the beginning of this analysis. At that time, senior academics were in search of a different way to address the reconstructive task. They resisted radical calls for 'organic intellectuals' and academic activists to 'join the swelling ranks of the masses' (Molobi 1994: 108). As James recalls, 'there had to be another way, and that was through education and induction'. Particular curriculum theories provided the formal 'way':

Bernstein had always been important ever since '75, with the early curriculum stuff – classification and framing. Bernstein is part of Robert's interest in curriculum which is amplified through Stenhouse above all, that teaching and learning is actually a formal procedure – it can't be remade in terms of workshops⁸⁸.

James's recollection is of the diploma curriculum moving 'quite slowly in a formal direction'. Data suggest two important 'events' in the late eighties. Basil Bernstein came to South Africa and gave his first set of seminars. These gave a 'powerful amplification' to the formal discourse and the need for a curriculum that inducted learners into powerful discourses. According to James, 'we realise that we've just been playing in a little puddle'. This

⁸⁸ This links to his views on workshops referred to below – what he sees as 'the double condition' of the workshop – emancipatory and oppressive.

occasioned an anti-experiential learning sentiment, for James particularly. In his interview, he problematises Kolbian modernist constructions of experience: 'It doesn't work. The idea that experience is transparent, just there, and you can just access it, turn it on like a screen, its crazy... experience is not available. Or if you make it available you are falling into an old-fashioned modernist trap...'. He also reconceptualises Boud's experiential learning methodologies in Foucauldian terms, as institutionalised technologies of power and self: 'At that stage, the notion of directly available experience to be interrogated, examined, categorised, drawn from, have the emotional contents excluded from etc – David Boud style...it's a methodist technology of the self, forget it, its got nothing to offer at all...'.

The diploma programme of 1998 (the year in question for this study⁸⁹) was an interesting blend of all the discursive turns in the programme's history. It was clearly academic, grounded in social theory, history and philosophy, yet according to two academics (Rosy and Joyce⁹⁰) remained tacit about its purpose and construction (despite the coming clean referred to above). Attention had shifted from a study of *education* to a study of *discourses* of education, particularly a critical exploration of 'major specialising' adult education discourses in South Africa at the time:

Introduction to social theory: structural and post-structural accounts of social explanation; conceptions of social practice and discourse. History and philosophy of adult education: an analysis of the development of the field of practitioner theory; including conceptions of learning and teaching. Major specialising discourses in adult education: workplace learning and human resource development; literacy and adult basic education and training; and adult education and social movements (Diploma brochure 1997).

⁸⁹ And the course that 'successful' RPL candidates accessed.

⁹⁰ A contract lecturer.

Documentary data suggest that a valuing of, and working with, experience was retained⁹¹:

‘Students bring to the course a rich variety of background and experience. The course offers them an opportunity to extend or develop their capacity to reflect on their experience, to see their work in context, to think innovatively about future goals and to develop new skills’ (ibid).

Although the discourses of both teaching programmes are dominant ‘departmental discourses’, there are other narratives at work in the department as a whole. In the early nineties a new discursive strand had entered the departmental arena, that of *policy research and policy analysis*. All members of the department were involved in this before and after 1994. There are data to suggest that policy work did not come easily to *the department*. As Joyce comments, ‘*We* have just never been able to speak to policy’. Aside from this, each tenured lecturer has his or her ‘own’ discursive strand. Martin’s strand is literacy as social practice. Roy’s⁹² is experiential learning. Rosy’s is worker education and education in social movements. Other interests (amongst non-tenured staff) include workplace education, student learning, adult basic education and training, and my own in RPL.

Given the above analysis, I am able to claim that a dominant departmental discourse of left-liberalism opens out in several directions. The surface of the diploma discourse is littered with terms such as ‘formal’ and ‘induction’, which suggest a particular reading of curriculum sociology which resonates with a hard boundary, Bernsteinian view of knowledge. Practices centre on deconstruction and scepticism: as Rosy puts it, ‘a healthy scepticism/critique [of narratives of emancipation and transformation] but from a liberal (not postmodern)

⁹¹ This suggests that it was not experience that was moved away from but experiential learning theory.

⁹² A senior lecturer and director of extra-mural activities.

perspective'. For example, avoiding what Robert saw as the seductive pull of orthodoxies of 'progressivism'. The concern is to build a cadre of critically transformative intellectuals drawn mainly from the NGO tradition⁹³ who can understand the complex terms and conditions of constraint and agency in particular situations and act accordingly: a clearly sociological task and a different form of activism. I would claim that both the certificate and diploma programmes are concerned with this, but in slightly different ways – through critical consciousness in the case of the certificate, and critical social theory in diploma⁹⁴.

There is evidence to suggest that the critical sociological strand (largely Bernsteinian) is the strongest discourse in *the department*, and that this is used as the basis for exploring alternative understandings. Other discursive tributaries join into the above. Discourses of experiential learning are rejected as an inadequate basis for social reconstruction, yet experience itself is retained as bedrock upon which to contextualise and (re)direct practice. The strongest discursive elements are linked to the two senior academics (Robert and James - both white and male). There is a strong association between person and discourse in this context: the latter is far from anonymous. Hence, the references to *we* and *the department* pertain to them (and by extension, to the diploma). The references accord collective and totalising characteristics which exclude other stories. There are different stories that could be told, but are not.

I now consider the power effects of the discourses, and what they determine as counting as important. The dominant discourses are self-consciously modernist. They are firmly grounded in critical rationality and social responsibility: there is a social and sociological project at

⁹³ As James says: 'The NGO world had a big smooth highway into the diploma...The diploma belonged to the NGO world in a very important sense'.

⁹⁴ The discursive differences between the two may well be one reason why it is so hard for students to progress, from a discourse privileging experience as a basis for social action to a 'formal', text-based curriculum.

work, concerned with the national reconstructive project and, through that, the creation of a 'better' society. However, there is scepticism about 'empowerment' and 'transformation'. I would argue that the social goals of the diploma are not about these terms as 'big' terms, but as more modest goals achievable through engagement with multiple forms of constraint. Although this implies forms of ideology critique through 'unmasking', it does not assume unproblematic 'progress' in a 'certain' world.

The discourse is powerfully validated by canonical knowledge, especially philosophy and critical social theory. The acquisition of knowledge is seen as the route to power. This position is exemplified by *the department's* abhorrence of personal testimony, for its narrativity and lack of claim to universality. The notion of self coded into dominant departmental discourse is neither humanistic nor subjectivist. Rather, it is a structuralist self, crafted at the intersection of constraint and agency.

Following Foucault, one would expect these discourses to have hidden disciplinary and power effects and to control by shaping ways of being and thinking in the department. In that way, on a reflexive note, I need to draw attention to their influence in shaping my own identity as an academic⁹⁵. I now turn my attention to an analysis of social practices in the department, in order to develop an understanding of the discourses-in-action. I analyse data in relation to three social practices: stratifications and differentiations, discursive apprenticeships and the family.

⁹⁵ Witness this PhD thesis and my philosophical positioning.

Social practices: stratifications and differentiations

Tenure, contracts and ‘projects’

Data suggest a clear distinction between staff with tenure (four white men and one white woman), those on contracts (three white women and one coloured woman) and those who were ‘project people’ (two white women). As a tenured and longstanding member of staff, Roy is not only aware of the power-effects of tenure and contract status, but free to speak out about them:

I hope that it [contract status] never stopped people from pushing at least some way down the line. But it certainly must have been a dynamic...I think there was a very real sense that certain people in the department, by virtue of tenure, position...clearly had a lot more power and therefore the freedom to do other things. Whereas others were subject to needing permission, in a sense, to do it. And this all comes out in all sorts of interactions with people...Well, I mean, I think that Martin and I, for example, just because we had tenure, whatever that means, certainly must have had more clout than the others. ‘The girls’ would all have considered themselves as having less clout than the male staff. You are all on contracts – short-term contracts sometimes...

Here we see academic privilege realised along lines of tenure (themselves reflecting gender and race privilege). A contract position is subject to top-down forms of authority and disciplinary power, (not free to do one’s own thing, no clout); whereby scope for action and challenge was delimited (can’t push, need permission). In my interview with Roy, I drew attention to the power limitations in my own position: ‘my contract was tied into my project’.

To which, he replied, ‘and so, how much can you push when you are dependent on a contract-type post?’ Status classifications imply particular standards of behaviour and modes of participation with those lower down the hierarchy being the most constrained and powerless (in the conventional understanding of the term).

Robert has a sociological understanding of the unevenness of relationships between the various classifications of employee. He speaks (wryly, but accurately) of senior academics: ‘we just sat in our tenure and made decisions about your life’. Speaking of my own position in a dispassionate way, he says: ‘you fell into the project category, you were a temporary creature’. For him, the public agenda of a project (the social issue concerned) is frequently fused with the personal identity of the project worker. This suggests a view that project people often lack critical distance on their practice: ‘It’s that projects are hugely embedded in individuals’ agendas. And projects are about the process of furthering those private agendas – not just private, they are public too’. Given this, data suggest that in the making of departmental appointments, it was important to like the person as well as the idea-project. As Robert says of my appointment: ‘there was someone we liked and wanted to have in the department and she had capital which we felt had mileage’. Frances⁹⁶ also speaks of the department ‘liking to have her around’. Data suggest that all staff in the department are acutely aware of their status. Frances, for example, refers to herself as ‘a project person’ and to the RPL project as having entered the department ‘very much as a project’. She has clearly inscribed her departmental identity with her classification.

Likeable people and projects (initially at least) have licence. As Robert says: ‘we didn’t mind too much where [the project] went, we thought it was productive – literacy, ABE, RPL....’

⁹⁶ A contract assistant lecturer.

However this suggestion of a laissez-faire approach is belied by Roy's reference to *the department* having a 'funny relationship to projects'. James speaks of things that often went wrong in project-department relationships, resulting in exclusion, giving the following example: 'and on that basis [an earlier project worker] angrily said she would have nothing to do with it and claimed to have been destroyed...'

This evidence suggests that *the department's* preparedness to host, a person-based recruitment strategy, and a relaxed management approach belie the operation of normative technologies of power, in that potential project staff are scrutinised for a degree of fit with departmental practices, interests and norms, and subsequently seek to constitute themselves in as 'likeable' a way possible. The identity of 'project worker' involves being evaluated on both project and disposition and, when in post, being more visible and more disciplined than tenured members of staff. There is a clear hierarchy of positionality to which staff are expected to align their behaviours and subjectivities.

Social practices: discursive apprenticeships

As foregoing analyses have shown, it is only Robert and James who speak directly about departmental discourse and it is they who have authority within it. I have suggested that tenured academics have their own discursive tracks and freedom to go their own way⁹⁷. The question becomes: what happens to contract staff and 'project people', discursively speaking?

One option, according to Frances, seems to be marginalisation:

⁹⁷ Because they are held to be self-regulating and disciplined by the mores of academic life more generally?

I had come to a particular understanding of learning...and I think it was not a framework that *the department* held in particularly high regard. It was socio-cultural ways of knowing and I didn't feel confident enough that it was a strong enough frame to reference myself to the whole time. So I think I tended to back off a little...I wouldn't be able to defend it easily. Now I would, but then I wouldn't...In terms of that, I felt my own theoretical frames marginalised me...

Data suggest another option that promoted/facilitated inclusion – *discursive apprenticeships*. It is Joyce who coins the term 'apprenticeship' and who speaks most cogently to it:

...as the newer and younger staff came in [to the department], they came in the very junior roles and they were apprenticed into the discourse of the department. Being in a different department now...it's very different. There just isn't that process of apprenticeship. You are yourself. You come in with your own things. And you might challenge or debate, but you don't come in and go through that process of apprenticeship where things are not made explicit – acquiring tacitly the sense about 'what we do here'...

In the interview with Frances, I say something similar myself, that, 'there was a sense in which I was acquiring and wanting to be part of the departmental discourse, as an academic, as a colleague, as a member of staff'. In response, Frances identifies a perceived tension between my role as project researcher and my identity as an apprentice in the department⁹⁸: 'So, you can't challenge it [the department] too much at the same time? Because you're feeling a bit of an apprentice and you're wanting acceptance and entry? So, you want to be lodged in it so you can't dislodge it at the same time?'

⁹⁸ Which in turn links to earlier data from Roy that my contract was tied to the project.

Joyce and Frances's very powerful statements suggest a range of disciplinary practices associated with the identity of *being an apprentice* - for example, the regulation of communicative practices (discourage particular kinds of challenging, debating, dislodging). In 'acquiring tacitly', the suggestion is that the apprentice learns by unconscious internalisation. It involves signs, symbolic markers of value, modelling, etc.

The above analysis suggests that apprenticeship brings forth a range of *identity positions*, for both 'masters' and apprentices/ acquirers of knowledge. The former, are the authority figures, modelling their knowledge (established, older, senior, male, white). The latter are 'new', 'younger' and 'junior' (female and not all white). The apprentices are not fully formed: as Joyce suggests, an apprentice is not him/herself. There is an assumption of *tabula rasa* – of apprentices coming in with no knowledge or very little, of having to learn the mysteries of the trade. They are in a state of becoming. They are going through a process of identity-formation in line with their status classification. This suggests compliance. Being an apprentice is similar to Rogoff's 'guided participation' (in Colley *et al.* 2003) where the emphasis is on ways individuals change through participation in a social practice. It does not go as far as her 'participatory approbation'. The particular form of apprenticeship in the department does not suggest that the dominant discourses change through participation. I would argue that apprenticeship also applies to diploma students.

There is evidence from Joyce and Frances to suggest that this process of identity-formation is destabilising and uncomfortable, in varying ways: 'You're in it but you're not in it. You haven't fully mastered the discourse. You hadn't got to a position of authority within it...you were half in and half out' (Joyce):

I was and I wasn't [part of *the department*]. I was, because I think that I often felt tolerated – and I mean that positively in a way – by Robert and James for various things... They liked having me around and I was made to feel part... But by yourself and by Rosy and Joyce... Roy, I was both liked and respected... [I felt] quite marginal to the departmental discourse as carried by the permanent members of staff and one or two others... At the same time it wasn't uncomfortable because I didn't know any other way to operate... (Frances).

Both Joyce and Frances speak of being half in and half out of the department ('you're in it but you're not', 'I was and I wasn't'). For Frances, not being a fully fledged member of the department is offset by feeling part of a community – her first academic community. For Joyce, the discomfort is stronger. She likens apprenticeship to 'recruitment into the staff's agenda' and is disturbed by, and resistant to, implicit authority and control issues.

Data suggest that junior academics are referenced to particular elements of the departmental discursive mix. I call this *discursive attachment*. Some attachments are stronger than others; some are supported by sponsors; and a couple of people in the department became discursively unattached or detached, that is, excluded. Frances refers to this process of attachment the most directly: 'So, I think I was *part of an aspect of the departmental discourse*' [my emphasis].

Her discursive attachment is to the certificate discourse. She has a weak link to diploma discourse (and to Robert) through work in learner support and academic development. Rosy embodied the certificate discourse in terms of her organisational Marxism. This is an important part of departmental discourse, and therefore a strong discursive attachment (manifested eventually as a tenured position). Joyce is part of the literacy discourse, but with an ABET policy and curricula specialisation. Although she is involved in policy (and wrote very critically about it), by her own admission she 'hadn't got a language' for it. Having been

a very successful master's student in the department, she brings the departmental/diploma discourses of hard boundaries and critical social theory to her positions on literacy and ABET policy and curricula. This allows her to speak about such matters as 'the incommensurability of people's own ways of knowing with the standard'. I was attached initially to the literacy discourse and subsequently to the experiential learning discourse. Rosy's view is that I embodied an experiential learning discourse that was 'critical (a la Brookfield) with some elements of Usher's post-modernist critiques'. As Robert observes, RPL was 'the capital that brought you here'. I was also attached to policy discourses. As Joyce notes, 'you were speaking the same language as policy'.

I would claim that the identity of apprentice reflects the formal and inductive nature of the dominant departmental discourse and creates a conduit for discipline. It can be seen as an instantiation of technologies of power, concerned with the conduct of conduct - the acquiring of 'what we do here' - through supervision, surveillance, and ultimately, normalisation (with penalties for non-compliance). It lays down terms for what can be said and done and constructs ways of being and possibilities for action and monitor-regulate individuals' progress and 'docility' (or otherwise). These are more finely tuned modes of differentiation and classification than status alone – dividing practices of objectification leading to subjectification.

Although clearly hierarchical in organisation, and although the community of practice in this case is not readily amenable to change, power is not only exercised *over* people. Rather, the power-knowledge of the 'masters' is invested and embodied in the apprentices. I would claim that apprenticeship is an enactment of technologies of power *and* technologies of the self. The practice of apprenticeship requires the willing and active participation of the apprentices,

engaging their desire to be part of the community. It requires buy-in. Apprenticeship affords the privilege of experiencing the world in a particular way. As such, rituals of power are not necessarily experienced as prohibitive; they are infused with desire and transformation of the self. They produce subject positions that feel both empowering and disempowering.

Full acceptance and entry as a 'good' academic is dependent on self-disciplined 'good' behaviour. The challenge is for apprentices to constitute themselves in the likeness/modes of being/discourses of the masters through subjecting themselves to technologies of power and self in an asymmetrical set of relationships. The pay-off is participation in debates and discovery, intellectual growth and growth of self-confidence. I would argue that the department is a powerful discursive community to which to align subjectivities and that in most cases this happens willingly and unconsciously.

Social practices: the family

The third departmental social practice goes under the metaphor of 'family'. Reference has already been made to a sense of being part of a community 'with its accompanying, yet perhaps mythical, characteristics of belonging and rewards' (Garrrick and Solomon 2001: 306). There is strong evidence to suggest that the department is run along family lines. Robert speaks of a 'family conversation', and of writing in a style that might 'produce amused discomfort within the family'. Data suggest that he sees himself as head of the family, with a 'strong embeddedness in the role of host and protector' (of projects). The following underscores the importance for him of family dynamics:

I think it was the dynamics and relationships in the department that we expected people to get on with other people...So unless things went badly awry, I would have expected to relate warmly and closely to you as a colleague. That's why when we did have conflicts in the department they were so awful for me, because I had invested so much in a family set of relationships – for good or for ill...

Following Foucault, Garrick and Solomon (2001: 305) locate 'the lure of belonging' at the intersection of technologies of power and self. This particular family, then, was very hierarchical, very warm, permissive in some ways, protective, supportive and intellectually challenging. The lure of belonging involves a lot of the self being drawn into the arrangement. Family members find themselves tightly bound to the structure and fiercely loyal when required to be. The reward is belonging to a 'good' academic family.

Yet the 'department as family' brings with it a wide range of other power dynamics, especially for junior academics/apprentices whose stay is dependent on behaviour. One is required to create oneself as a family member through various technologies of self, such as earning and gaining approval for one's academic work and approximating the dominant discourse. Robert refers to the effect of assessment on some diploma students as *the department's* 'real bite' being 'terminal'. I would argue that the metaphor carries over into more general departmental dynamics. Expulsion from the family represents the ultimate disciplinary sanction. I would therefore claim that the family metaphor is a very powerful disciplining and normalising technology especially when juxtaposed with an apprenticeship system. It is interesting to note that technologies of the self do not require anything resembling confession or verbalisation (which would be seen as too humanistic and experiential). I suggest that the absence of such rituals renders the workings of power less visible and less amenable to discussion. This has the

effect of intensifying the activities of self-discipline and self-policing, perhaps, making them less open to resistance.

The department and the project

This part of the analysis explores engagements between the department and the RPL project, prior to the pilot process. Being closer to the actual events and relationships, documentary data are treated as primary where possible, with interview data used to explore symmetries and asymmetries between records and recollections of events.

Getting the RPL project lodged in the department

Why and how did the RPL project cross the departmental boundary to become a departmental project in the first place, whereas others did not? Data suggest two main reasons. As James says, the battle was half-won by my being a departmental apprentice already; and secondly, through what he terms, the *organisation of relations*: ‘there are some really fascinating issues involved. The way in which the RPL research project, before it even becomes empirical, organises its relations to the department, or the department organises its relations to the project’.

Frances also notes procedure and protocol, ‘the way that you and the project went through formal steps in the department’. James offers more detail about what comprised ‘formal steps’ and the ‘organisation of relations’. In his view, the RPL project crossed the boundary to become a ‘departmental project’ because it had a *sponsor* who was a tenured member of staff (Roy). I was required (via RPL) to attach myself discursively to the experiential learning

strand of the departmental discourse. Furthermore, the project was to have a strong *manager* identity associated with it – Roy, again. As James and Robert observe: ‘Roy would manage the relations with the funder – especially the financial relations – and could guarantee the money’ (James) and ‘Roy was involved methodologically and financially and managerially’ (Robert).

The RPL project was essentially disciplined by its discursive attachment to a tenured member of staff. I would argue that *the department* delegated surveillance and normalisation to Roy. In this way, Roy ‘managed the boundary [between the department and the project] very successfully’ (James). Although disciplined, I remained part of the departmental family. Roy got a research project. The department got to host a policy-related project at low cost in terms of money and intellectual engagement (in its first phase at least). Here was a confluence of ‘wills to power’ (or mutual interests) within the force-field of an academic department.

How did the department engage with the project and the concept of RPL?

Phase one of the project involved the department in its traditional hosting identity, offering, as Robert put it, ‘some degree of space and some degree of legitimacy from which to operate’. The department was therefore not actively engaged with the project⁹⁹. The project was ‘allowed’ to operate under Roy’s management. After all, as Robert says, ‘having a project didn’t carry anything – didn’t carry consequences for you – it was just the world it carried consequences for!’ The only formal communication was via regular reports submitted to departmental meetings. But, as Frances recalls, the project ‘couldn’t really speak to the

⁹⁹ Except that Frances and Rosy were commissioned to write papers and I solicited informal feedback from Robert and James on theoretical papers that I was writing (thereby continuing to shape my identity as an apprentice).

department... given the departmental canon and those kinds of things'. This suggests, from an early stage, a discursive dissonance between project and department.

Interview data reveal much about what various members of the department actually thought about the project and the idea of RPL during this first phase. Roy offers a useful starting-point for analysis: 'The two clearest positions would have been James on the one end, who I don't think was that keen...through to someone like Frances, who'd be very enthusiastic about bringing new students into the university...' I start the analysis from here and then explore other positions and views¹⁰⁰. James's stance towards RPL is a *cynical* one operationalised through *parody*. The following illuminates this stance:

...workers who have all these skills are going to be able to check-in one morning to the garage and be re-serviced and come out with RPL as university graduates...That is going to be an ever-present temptation to the RPL teams as they rush around the country, saying, 'yes, I know you've *only* been a sweeper in the factory'¹⁰¹, but remember that you've seen all the engineers at work, and you know what they do because you've watched them. You're really an engineer aren't you?' And so he thinks, 'so, it wasn't really a boundary after all? I can go and build bridges tomorrow!'

He is parodying RPL at various levels: as a (non) pedagogic intervention of 're-servicing'; as taking a very soft boundary (or no boundary) approach to knowledge; and as suggesting that people will be given overly high humanistic expectations, 'you have it in you to be...and they are going to find that they don't'. James's dispute with RPL is political and epistemological.

¹⁰⁰ I am analysing what people say about their views (and the views of others) rather than how they act out those views in meetings etc. (see below). This allows me to avoid the dangers of taking interview data at face value.

¹⁰¹ Here he is alluding to a discourse of promise and radical transformation linked to the National Qualifications Framework – the 'from sweeper to engineer' story – of unhindered progress and redress.

He is doubtful of its capacity to achieve the social and knowledge engineering it aspires to, either inside or outside the university. He reflects on his concern and surprise that the pilot proposed nursing and adult education as fields for empirical work, on the grounds that such fields were already relatively 'porous'. He calls these entry points 'unguarded gates' and a 'bit of a cheat' as choices, since they would not test the 'real' efficacy and generalisability of RPL as a redress mechanism.

Conversely, Frances's stance towards the concept of RPL, and the project, is *proactive*. The following quotations illustrate her view. She starts from the perspective of knowledge and says that, for her, RPL is 'about ways of transformation - it ought to be, it has to be – of knowledge, of forms of knowledge'. She is referring to transformation of formal knowledge, not individuals' experiential knowledge. This becomes clearer when she says that she 'went in [to the project] as an activist. I went in as a knowledge activist', and that she hoped RPL 'would be quite a radical challenge, quite a direct challenge, and quite a confrontational challenge – in a positive way, you know'. As such, she saw RPL in radically inclusive terms and as challenging the university, by her own admission, perhaps 'naively' and idealistically so. She reflects that she was entering the field and project of RPL as a novice, doing 'catch up' with me, and wanting 'to understand the terms and to wrestle with them'. Interview data suggest that she didn't have the time to 'carry [RPL] around in her head'. It became an 'add on' to her 'involvement with learning': 'I added RPL onto that'.

For Frances, then, RPL is attached to her own academic interests and, through them, to particular discourses of learning ('socio-cultural ways of knowing') and access. As foregoing analysis has shown, she perceives these as being at a distance from dominant departmental

discourses, although retrospectively (and ‘objectively’) they were powerful frames against which to reference RPL.

Regarding other departmental views about RPL (and the project), Roy’s interest in experiential learning leads him to be *supportive* of the idea and the capacity of RPL to effect democratic institutional change: ‘it is possible to break through these rules that get laid down and that make no sense at all in many cases’. His supportive stance is borne out in his role in the management of the project, to ‘support and push that process along’. However, as analysis has already shown, experiential learning discourses were very weak in the department.

Data suggest that Robert has contradictory positions in relation to the project. On the one hand, he engages with it in his familial role of ‘host and protector’: ‘I saw myself as being very supportive to you and Frances in the project. My commitment lay in facilitating the work you were doing and protecting it...’ His engagement reflects his discursive position, that is, as ‘master’, with an enjoyment of intellectual engagement, even if, as was often the case with RPL, ‘in disagreement’.

On the other hand, he is very clear that it wasn’t a project he was personally interested in, theoretically or politically. It does not fit with his commitment to education as induction, and the development of transformative intellectuals to play a role in the national reconstructive project: ‘Perhaps I should begin by saying [the RPL project] wasn’t something I owned and at no point did I own it as a theoretical research or even a political commitment. That’s very significant’. He views RPL as an empty concept: ‘it seemed to me to be a “portfolio” into which almost anything could be put’. For him, the only possible positive outcome of RPL is likely to be an unsustainable one – a temporary disturbance to dominant discourses and

knowledge: ‘...what it’s doing at best is generating a critique of a curriculum, a critique of an institution through an affirmation of the world. Now that can be totally emasculated by the institution – but it does have that power...’ At the time, I did not understand Robert’s and James’s position, but would now claim that they were opposed to the concept and practice of RPL as a vehicle for achieving redress.

Joyce is *critical* of RPL on political and theoretical/conceptual counts in similar ways to Robert and James. She sees RPL as over-signified in national policy: ‘the label and the slot in policy certainly signified something very big’. She is critical of the way RPL is linked unproblematically to a (for her, problematic) national transformation agenda/discourse which promises too much and within which access to formal education is, in her view, over-privileged:

I think I’m just so much more cautious about what education achieves and can achieve and therefore what transformation needs to be about. And maybe that’s because I’m much more cautious about the big transformation in South Africa. And where are we going you know?¹⁰²

Her third area of criticism concerns rebranding. She feels that RPL rebranded theoretical interests of hers, beginning in popular education where ‘the first thing was that you find out where people are at – you find out what people know’ but where ‘it wasn’t about gaining access to formal education, it was about struggling against apartheid’. She claims that the same issues ran through her involvement in literacy, where she argues that ‘a whole aspect...was a surfacing of knowledge that people had, which wasn’t codified as official literacy’.

¹⁰² This links to a point made in the departmental workshop (see below) about RPL creating and perpetuating a modernist myth of mobility.

Given her previous theoretical interests, she cannot engage with the RPL discourse, because it has *no* theory: 'I just felt that I didn't have a handle on what RPL was. And I still don't'. She links this to policy discourse generally and to the way it silenced her. There are numerous references in her interview to *language*: 'I hadn't got a language', 'a new language', 'I didn't know how to talk to her [a visiting professor and adviser to the RPL project¹⁰³]. She came in with a whole discourse around RPL and I couldn't match mine with hers although I often had the feeling that it was the same set of issues...from a different angle', 'It was the language issue again'. Lack of a common language results in her feeling disorientated and disenfranchised: 'at a loss', 'felt strange', 'couldn't come at it in any way'.

Rosy is *interested* but does not engage with the idea of RPL or the research project in a strong way. In her words: 'I remember feeling very marginal to it. Not because I wasn't interested in it, but I didn't think my role was the research. It was as a member of the department....'

There is a sense of everyone keeping a distance from the RPL project. Robert says, 'I did regard it as somewhat semi-private territory of yours'. James says that he saw his role in relation to the project as subordinate to Robert's. Frances brought her own theoretical interests to bear, although does say that, '[RPL] was also more your [my] space'. Roy retained his manager identity and Joyce remained sceptical. Rosy retained a respectful distance.

There is evidence to suggest that it was RPL's attachment to the weaker and less theoretical discourses of the department and its location as a 'project' that placed it on the margins of the department. As Frances comments, RPL was not seen as: '...significant theoretical and

¹⁰³ About whom more below.

conceptual work that [Robert and James] ought to consider quite seriously'. In phase one of the project, there was thus a weak dialogue between the project and dominant departmental discourse. In hindsight, Frances argues that the project could have been conceptualised differently from the outset, with more of a focus of knowledge: 'I think if you, for instance, launched a project now¹⁰⁴, with all that you know about RPL, you'd come at it completely differently. You'd argue for it strongly and confidently as a theoretical project'. This alignment to the dominant discourse was not possible at the time because of my position as apprentice to that discourse.

In a more interpretive vein, analysis shows that the strongest authority voices in the department were the most sceptical about the efficacy of RPL as a redress measure. RPL did not fit with their theoretical positions and political views on reconstruction through induction into formal knowledge structures. Roy and Rosy were cautiously supportive of the concept. Joyce was critical. And Frances, arguably in the weakest status position, was the most committed. The project was marginal in the department, partly by definition (being a 'project') and partly because of its perceived attachment to experiential learning and policy discourses. Scepticism and marginality account for what Frances sees as 'a sense of not explicit ambivalence' towards the project in departmental meetings. The idea of RPL was a discursive transgression, not because it was too 'progressive', but because it was not progressive enough.

The above analysis clearly shows that the RPL project was, even in its early stage, part of existing departmental discursive and power relations, because Frances and I were.

Departmental discourses worked their way through the project by way of established social practices and (largely hierarchical) modes of discipline and surveillance. Existing technologies

¹⁰⁴ That is, at the time of the interviews, November 2000.

of power were extended to the project in the form of differently formalised discursive attachments, sponsorship and (day to day) management. The productive side of power came to the fore again in the ways that, as project co-ordinator, I constructed myself as an apprentice and shaped by identity accordingly. The project as a whole became apprenticed.

The RPL project

The RPL pilot was also situated within the broader dynamics of RPL research project activities as a whole. It is to data pertaining to those influences that I now turn¹⁰⁵. As mentioned, one of the aims of phase one was to theorise RPL. In the original proposal, this was expressed as follows: ‘To create an educational theoretical frame for RPL drawing on experiential learning theory, adult learning theory, assessment theory, the ‘access’ paradigm and postmodernist critiques of education and training’.

Documentary data from phase one show that a range of theoretical concerns surfaced. Three papers were written. In the first paper, ‘RPL in South Africa: Contexts, challenges and options’ (Harris 1996), I wrote that RPL sat ‘at the interface of knowledges’ and was ‘a site for the consideration of knowledges’. An ambitious pedagogy was envisaged, one that involved ‘both problematising and developing formal academic skills’. There was a clear radical discourse in the expressed need to find ‘new ways to challenge dominant and powerful values, structures and taxonomies of knowledge’.

¹⁰⁵ I have deliberately kept this section as short as possible for reflexive reasons. Documentary evidence here is largely my own work. However, as PhD researcher I think it is necessary to trace influences on the shaping of the pilot. I am mindful that this piece of analysis is inevitably subjective and cannot claim to be wholly reliable.

My second paper, 'RPL: Drifts and shifts in international practices' (Harris 1997a), focused on changing discourses and practices of RPL, which I then saw as involving a shift from humanistic discourses to behaviourist-managerial ones. The paper questioned the discourses that were at work in the South African context (particularly within the NQF) and sounded some cautionary notes that consequences and effects of RPL practices might not be as radical as hoped. Frances wrote the third paper, drawing social-cultural learning theory into the ambit of RPL¹⁰⁶.

Another feature of phase one was situational analyses in the fields of adult educator development and the professional development of nurses. Documentary data from these analyses suggest that there was broad political support for the redress philosophy of RPL in both fields. There was acknowledgement of the breadth of valuable informal learning, as in: 'There's a huge need to recognise the informal learning that masses of people have gained particularly in this country and particularly because of the history of our country' (interviewee quoted in Harris 1997b: 27).

But there were also worries, resistances and concerns. Some interviewees suggested that RPL was already being seen as an easy route into the fields concerned: 'it isn't a panacea for everyone who wanted an education'. One interviewee asked whether RPL was going to be about the 'creation of instant practitioners...when you know that the quality of education in the past has been so poor...are you going to just accredit that and let people carry on?' (Harris 1997b: 27). The ambiguities reported here reflect those at the heart of RPL, namely, what knowledge is being recognised, and why?

¹⁰⁶ Her paper is referenced elsewhere in the thesis, but not here for reasons of anonymity.

By the end of phase one, RPL had a complex and ambitious agenda, involving resistance to a behaviourist-managerial approach and also taking account of radical and postmodern critiques of experiential learning as articulated in the writings of Michelson, Usher and Stuart¹⁰⁷ (see Harris 1997d). This agenda is illustrated by the following extract from a ‘summary of issues to continue to grapple with in phase two’ of the project. Here we see a radical-postmodern set of ‘principles’, with very unclear and untheorised boundaries between them. It is neither a hard nor soft boundary approach to knowledge. Rather, it problematises the way institutional knowledge practices mirror historical inequalities. Postmodern discourses seem to be put to work in support of radical (and modernist) ends:

- Can we find ways to keep definitions of learning and power relations between the academy, knowledge and redress on the agenda? This will involve attempting to transcend the embedded view that knowledge is owned by the academy.
- Do we want RPL to be more than a ‘translation device’...? Can we develop an approach that also takes account of understandings of learning from experience within emancipatory contexts¹⁰⁸?
- If we want to avoid a modernist approach we will have to take on board:
 - experience as embedded in social context and social practices not solely individualised as in the humanist paradigm;
 - experience as inter-related with knowledge and action not a precursor;
 - alternative approaches to the experience/reflection/knowledge methodology;
 - acknowledgment that advancement is problematic... (Harris 1997d: 8-9).

Phase two of the project heralded a shift in position. Situation analyses resulted in the very telling adoption of a new definition of RPL. The original working definition was:

¹⁰⁷ Authors of international case studies for the project.

¹⁰⁸ Presumably social movements.

RPL is primarily concerned with the development of practices to value adults' learning - learning that has not been formally accredited within an educational, professional, training or workplace context. Such learning may be acquired informally or through non-formal or formal means (Harris 1997b: 51).

This was bland and vague. The 'new' definition foregrounded learning: 'RPL is both a process of learning and of accreditation, in the context of respect for people's knowledges' (Harris 1997b: 27). The definition clearly illustrates the project's growing pedagogical concerns: was it about recognising the same knowledge, or new learning, or about translating into 'academese', or was it about recognising subjugated knowledges? Analysis suggests different languages and logics at work here, with the radical-postmodern agenda being gradually reargrounded.

Eight criteria were devised, and agreed with the project steering committee (PSC), to inform selection of institutional sites for pilot work:

1. Flexibility in access arrangements (including the possibility for multiple entry points)...
2. The provision of educational/career guidance for learners as/if required;
3. Mechanisms to ensure that attention be given to foundational learning – either through extended learning programmes or academic development/support or both;
4. Articulated learning programmes so that learner progression routes are as open as possible;
5. A strong dialectic between experience and theory within the curriculum;
6. The adoption of teaching and learning (including assessment) methodologies that support the above dialectic;
7. A concern to ensure a balance between integrated curricula and flexible curriculum programming/open learning;

8. An institutional context within which the above developments are supported or at least have a reasonable chance of success... (Harris 1997b: 28).

There is no radical-postmodern agenda here. The discourse is technical and programmatic. The project used a different discursive register and syntax to engage with the implementation of RPL, as against engaging conceptually (in critique/exploratory mode). Sobered by field conditions and the spectre of implementation, as project co-ordinator, I shifted my attention to RPL methodology, and in July 1997, wrote a paper called 'The Recognition of Prior Learning: In search of a "learning approach" and a methodology'. Given hindsight and fresh analytical tools, this paper reads as a desperate attempt to arrive at a pedagogy of RPL, other than experiential learning. A clear discursive shift occurs where I make reference to the need for a pedagogy of reparation and remediation without theorising relationships between the two:

Given the legacy of apartheid education, many of the learners presenting themselves for RPL will have had their experience and prior learning constructed under conditions of inequality and disadvantage. This presents a double imperative. Firstly, the need to recognise existing/prior learning as a means of reparation and secondly, the need to make up for past lack of educational opportunity in such a way as to secure the best chances for future academic success (Harris 1997c: 2).

Furthermore, this paper is clearly written by an apprentice. It ranges in an undisciplined and unfocused way across academic territories and traditions drawing selectively from adult and experiential learning theory, cognitive learning theory, assessment theory, curriculum theory and sociolinguistics. This medley brought forth some key concepts that subsequently influenced the discourse of the RPL pilot: 'agency', the 'gap' and 'epistemological access'

(from Morrow 1994). 'Agency' came from James Gee's (1990) work on primary and secondary discourses. It sought to capture the movements that learners do make, despite Gee's gloomy prognosis. It was the wrong term. The 'gap' came from my interpretation of Bernstein's work and the idea that work and life experience do not simplistically promote access to the traditional vertical discourses of higher education.

From here, it was a relatively short step to Vygotsky's work on social constructivist learning theory. In a personal communication to James (15/07/97), I explained this in the following way: 'After meandering around all the difficulties I end up with Vygotsky as a way to embrace prior/past learning and experience and as a way to allow potential and potentialising into the process as a central feature'. Vygotsky's work provided the bridge between the radical-postmodern conceptualisation of RPL and the demands of implementation. It represented a discursive holding place, a post-revolutionary, social approach to learning and a set of practical tools, especially the concepts of 'zones of proximal development', 'scaffolding' and 'potentialising'. The following extracts from my notes on Vygotsky indicate what I then took to be the pedagogic direction:

Develop the RPL space as a community of practice, a social space...Present tasks that require a group effort...focus on the group creating shared meaning (loans of consciousness), collaborative understanding of concepts, provide structures/rules explicitly. Make hidden processes as visible as possible. Assist through demonstration, collaboration, direction, analysis of texts/writing, develop conscious awareness of learning processes, learning by discovery...Generate a specific problem-solving environment...

This clearly evidences discursive shift. It replaces radical-postmodernism with social constructivist learning theory.

In summary, theoretical work in phase one viewed RPL as an 'open text'. The radical-postmodern discourse was not in contact with other discourses or material practices - with history, sociality or structure. I would claim that it was an (unsuccessful) attempt to orientate RPL to some of the project's international case studies, in the hope that this would align with the dominant departmental discourse¹⁰⁹. It was a 'virtual' and private way of thinking about RPL, a pleasant utopian story without operational strategies, without, as Robert puts it, cranes and levers. This discourse was radically unstable and unsure of itself. But I would argue that flights of fancy gave way to more realistic appraisals of networks of institutional and professional power relations within which pilots were to be located. The discourse shifted from a radical-postmodern one to a social constructivist learning discourse concerned with remediation and epistemological access to existing knowledge structures. The journey of institutional and academic drift mirrors the frequent disjuncture in RPL literature between espoused theories and those in use, with no clear language of movement between the two.

The department and the pilot

Negotiating the 'site' boundary

The department was recommended to the Project Steering Committee (PSC) as a potential pilot site for RPL on the grounds that it met most of the above-mentioned eight criteria. The negotiation of the department site boundary happened in two stages. First, Roy presented the

¹⁰⁹ It is interesting to note that it is the department that influenced the project, not the broader representation of the PSC. This foregrounds my own subjectivity and positionality as an apprentice in the department.

proposal informally to the then head of department (James). Secondly, he requested that I hold parallel informal consultations with other staff. An 'in principle' agreement with the department was reached. At the consequent Programme Working Group (PWG)¹¹⁰ meeting, a pilot orientated to the diploma was proposed. There were fall-back positions:

On the basis of successful completion of the RPL process, learners could either:

- (i) Be granted access to the new [diploma] (i.e. level 3) in 1998;
- (ii) Be advised to enter at level 1 in 1998 (possibly with exemptions);
- (iii) Be advised to apply to enter at level 2 (at end of 1998) (Report for PWG on 21/7/97).

The notes from the meeting indicate that a formal decision was made, somewhat reluctantly: 'Dept aware that RPL *as a concept* is in need of investigation; dept in support of its role as a site at entry to [the diploma] with fall back positions... [my emphasis] (Notes from PWG 21/7/97).

The above analysis belies the complex patterns of resistance at work during the movement from department as 'host' to department as 'site'. As Roy puts it: 'there was a lot of resistance and I think bewilderment in some cases of why academics inside the department are now fighting a process which they'd been hosting'. Data suggest four types of resistance. First, analysis has already shown that the senior academics involved with the diploma were the most sceptical about the political efficacy of RPL as a redress measure. Roy suggests that individuals became very concerned about the impact of RPL on diploma practice: 'I think you're meeting blocks in the individual which raises questions like "How's this going to affect me?"' Robert was also 'concerned about the transition from RPL being a departmentally-

¹¹⁰ The departmental staff group concerned with the design and management of teaching programmes. Its title has been changed to protect anonymity.

based project to being a project that addressed the department...as a case'. He suggests that the move from the former to the latter was politically 'very astute or naïve depending on your understandings', given that it carried 'practical consequences' for existing practices: 'While it was an enquiry, my scepticism was quite positive and justified and necessary in a research project. But as a convenor of a programme or head of department – whichever I was at the time – RPL had powerful practical consequences...' It was the 'practical consequences' that created the resistance.

Secondly, data suggest concern about the effect the political project of RPL would have on staff relations and loyalties: 'Issues of staffing and loyalties...the need for critical distance...problems of role change in relation to the department...changes relationships' (Notes from PWG 21/7/97). Thirdly, there was concern about RPL formalising alternative admissions and interfering with established autonomy in this regard:

The question of would we be obliged – having gone through a certain process – to accept certain students? If that were the case what implications would that have for rules and procedures and therefore justice in terms of other potential candidates? Maybe at a deeper level, did we really want to do this? (Robert).

Roy puts himself in Robert's and/or James's position and speaks in their voice¹¹¹, pointing out what they might have thought about the formalisation of alternative admission through RPL:

It [the existing exception rule] was exceptional. It wasn't actually putting in place an alternative access route which was no longer an exception. Although it fell under the exception

¹¹¹ 'Speaking for' Robert and James relates to references to *the department*. It is about the way in which Robert and James were so central that discussions are referenced to their voices even when they were absent. The dominant discourse was therefore always present and always in circulation. Even James speaks in Robert's voice.

rule to get them in, it was actually becoming a legitimising way of bringing people in. So it was no longer subject to the whim in a sense of – ‘now, there’s a good person...’ Now there was a process and if the process ran, you couldn’t have a whim that said ‘no’.

The fourth reason for resistance lay in the wider university context. The department itself was under surveillance at that time. The impact of new higher education policies and shifts to managerialism were being felt. The department was under review. Senior academics were fighting battles on that front. As Roy puts it, ‘the very boundaries of the department itself were under threat’. A political commitment to RPL (as against a research commitment) was seen as having the potential to weaken further an already weak position. In the university’s terms, the department’s programmes were already seen as ‘a bit “iffy”’ because ‘they’re not proper degree programmes’. Moreover, the department had won entry to the certificate ‘without matric’. Roy explains the implications from the university’s point of view:

We’ve already won the certificate entry without matric. Now suddenly, you’re winning entry into the diploma – which is M+3, with a process that doesn’t even require a matric in it. So, now you can get into the diploma without a matric – at an M+3 level....

Roy’s point is that ‘even if you say “RPL’s a good process, it’s educationally sound”, if you’re a department under threat, can you continue to defend it?’ This quote suggests that RPL could have further undermined the department’s position by contributing to what was seen as a non-academic identity. Put like this, the department was taking a risk with allowing the diploma to be a pilot site for RPL, and RPL was not worth the risk.

Evidence suggests two main reasons why the above resistances were accommodated and a commitment to the RPL pilot was given. Data suggest that the project *had* been politically

astute, in that *the department* as project host found it hard to refuse to be a site. There is a sense of foregone conclusion in the following comment from James: 'The site boundary is a different kind of question and much more contested although my case would be that the contest was finally closed because of the department's agreement to host...' Secondly, the department made a shrewd distinction between the diploma as research site and site of political intervention site, as follows: 'Need to find a balance between emphasising the pilot nature and the research site aspects and the political intention of alternative and permissive access for those without formal qualifications' (Notes from PWG on 21/7/97).

In a more interpretive vein, power issues came to the fore in negotiating access to a pilot site for RPL within departmental teaching programmes. Analysis has already shown the stark status divide between teaching programmes and projects. Access to teaching programmes was not the norm: established boundaries and power relations were disturbed. The force-field of power seemed to consist of several enabling and constraining factors. Beginning with informal negotiations seemed to have a smoothing effect. This capitalised on earlier agreements, commitments, 'organisations of relations', on intra-departmental discursive ways of being, social practices and relationships (including the notion of family). Relational aspects of power, rather than solely hierarchical ones, were exploited. The discourse and social project of RPL were transgressions of the dominant discourse. Thus, technologies of power intensified as the project moved closer to the inner workings of the department. The result was that the pilot was positioned as a research enterprise rather than a practical intervention: it was positioned by the possibilities for action constructed by the dominant discourse. In this way, family relations were threatened, but maintained.

Disciplining the pilot

Once the site boundary had been crossed, inter-departmental negotiations continued. Data show a set of steps on the way to the pilot's implementation. First, a *special RPL sub-group* of the PWG (consisting of Robert, Rosy, Joyce and Roy) was set up to 'support' Frances¹¹² and myself in designing the pilot, including the development of a recruitment strategy, RPL assessment criteria, and an RPL process:

- (i) The development of a recruitment strategy.
- (ii) The establishment of criteria for each entry level based on the four-year programme curriculum specifications and on the dual programme goals of practitioner and academic development¹¹³.
- (iii) The development of a context-specific RPL process (Report for PWG meeting on 21/7/97).

In a classic self-disciplining move, I requested more formal support (and surveillance?) from the department asking that the 'RPL Project becomes a standing item on PWG agendas until completion of the pilot' (Report for PWG on 21/7/97). This was agreed.

Secondly, *the department* requested a *formal agreement* with the funder and the project. The agreement was about who should do what, clearly stating that the department was in no way beholden to the project or to any of its research findings, and that the department would have the final say about admissions. It read as follows:

¹¹² Frances was seconded to the project for one day per week.

¹¹³ An interesting mention of practitioner and academic development - indicative of divisions/ dichotomies to come?

The department agrees to act as a site for the model building and piloting research phase...Provisos are as follows:

1. The department is not bound to accept all project outcomes and reserves the right to make its own judgements about student admissions.
2. Linked to the above, the project will present the department with recommendations regarding which students could be admitted to departmental programmes on the basis of the RPL process.

At first sight, the establishment of the sub-group and the formal agreement appear to be straightforward and explicit disciplining and regulating moves that subject the pilot to the authority of *the department*, excluding certain possibilities for action and preserving others. But there is other evidence to suggest that the way in which this was done and the motivations behind it were more broadly representative of departmental social practices and complex configurations of power and identity. Robert's role is pivotal. He saw the subgroup as 'negotiating a new contract' – part-disciplining and part-mentoring, wanting the pilot to be 'real' not 'dummy', being 'serious'. In this way, he can be seen as presenting learning opportunities to the apprentices, that is, opportunities to engage more closely with the dominant discourse:

Because of my strong embeddedness in the role of host and protector – that was probably why I was quite strong on bureaucracy and rules – negotiating a new contract...I saw myself as having to move into bureaucratic mode in order to treat the project seriously. Otherwise, one could have shoe-horned it in [to the diploma/site] – and it could have been dummy (Robert).

Armed with a 'supportive' sub-group and a 'regulatory' agreement, the project moved into 'model building'. Frances and I were concerned to operationalise the Vygotsky-inspired 'learning approach' to RPL. There was also to be 'an enquiry into the discursive specificity of the [diploma] context – an attempt to “crack the code”' (Notes from phase two, model building and piloting: 5), prefiguring a 'new learning', inductive type of RPL. Reference to 'an attempt' suggests that as apprentices we were not sure whether we could do this.

Data suggest that a concern with 'criteria' for assessment was foregrounded: 'we will need to develop some criteria for making decisions about who will be selected' to the diploma (Notes from phase two, model building and piloting: 5). We decided initially to do this by reviewing diploma assignments (examples of average-scoring students' work) and certificate assignments (examples of high-scoring students' work), together with some of the readings used on each course. This review was to be compared with cross-university access criteria being developed by academic development staff in the form of an alternative admissions test for school leavers. Based on this documentary analysis, drafts of criteria were to be fed back to the department via workshops. This is extremely significant retrospectively. It was to be a similar exercise to the one undertaken by Robert¹¹⁴ (of which we were unaware at the time), and was very in keeping with departmental practice and very much institution-diploma focused. However, as analysis will show, it did not happen.

Eventually, an action and research agenda was established for the piloting process¹¹⁵. This consisted of working hypotheses, objectives and research questions. The hypotheses, based largely (apart from 'agency') on an approximation of the dominant discourse in the department, were:

¹¹⁴ See page 176-7.

¹¹⁵ There were eleven drafts – a result of our apprentice status and unstable discourse?

- successful transition to a higher education context is affected by individual and social factors – an interactive mosaic of learner roles and identities, ‘agency’, the nature of the learning context and learning tasks, meaning-construction and exchange and boundary negotiation;
- higher education contexts embody many ‘schemes of perception, thought and action’ but are broadly characterised by the dominance of vertical discourses (although some are more vertical than others);
- work and life experience (and predominantly horizontal discourses) do not simplistically promote access to the more traditional vertical discourses of higher education. We need to better understand ‘agency’ as one way to support the transition;
- in order to enhance learner chances of success in higher education, RPL needs to be explicitly concerned with both physical and epistemological access (From endnote of agreement between funder, project and department).

The objectives set out a plan of action for the pilot:

1. Focus on access to the department’s [diploma] programme.
2. Explore Vygotsky’s concepts of ZPD and ‘test-teach-test’ and related concepts of ‘scaffolded’ learning as methodological starting points for model building.
3. Devise a process that is context-specific, that seeks to uncover, recognise and value prior learning, to generate new learning pertinent to context and that informs curriculum development within the diploma¹¹⁶.
4. Devise a recruitment strategy and market the RPL opportunity to potential learners
5. Explore the devising of access criteria for the diploma...
6. Select +/-10 potential learners for RPL.

¹¹⁶ ‘Informs’ implies that we were not planning practical engagement.

7. Pilot the RPL process...
8. Evaluate the model (in collaboration with the funder) particularly in terms of transferability and sustainability.

Research questions were developed which again attempted to emulate the dominant discourse.

These included:

- What does the pilot research tell us about the practitioner roles, kinds of practice (including learner roles), sites of practice and knowledge bases of RPL applicants? What implications does this hold for curriculum?
- Can learner 'agency' be enhanced through an RPL process?
- How can we better understand the 'gap' (relation) between different forms of knowledge?
- Under what curriculum conditions would individual RPL candidates succeed best? (link to epistemological access)
- Can we develop provisional RPL assessment/access criteria with regard to the diploma?

The action and research agenda clearly incorporated elements of the departmental discourse, most particularly through the notion of a 'new learning' type of RPL (using Vygotsky to accelerate this), the centrality of 'epistemological access' and the references to Bernstein's horizontal and vertical discourses. Additionally, there was an implicit hard boundary philosophy in 'different forms of knowledge'.

A visiting professor from the USA was invited to act as advisor/support to the pilot for five weeks¹¹⁷. Her role was as 'a resource' and a 'critiquer'. Notes from a meeting between Frances and me (on 22/8/97) exemplify the nature of her critique. She suggested that we were

¹¹⁷ Miriam is known internationally for her expertise and theoretical work in the field of RPL. She came with her own research project which was linked to this one.

in danger of 'imposing ZPD on learners according to our own judgement'. She argued that our conceptualisation of 'agency' was about 'deficiency assumptions implicit in terms such as "under-preparedness"'. She presented us with an injunction not to conflate practitioner and academic knowledge:

They are separate. RPL candidates typically have a great deal of one and relatively little of the other...Of course there is some overlap, since analytical skills are both academic and content-related...How and to what degree can a high level of content knowledge compensate for a relative lack of academic skills? To the degree that they don't compensate, what kind of student support can be made available? (Notes to Judy and Frances, no date).

She drafted critical comments on our 'learning approach'. In them one can discern a discourse of subjugated knowledge. It was the return of the radical discourse that we had moved away from when faced with the practicalities of implementation:

...the problem with this view [the learning approach], however, is that it fails to consider that the experience of life under apartheid was itself productive of important knowledge that is both worthy of academic 'recognition' and of importance to the development of professional practice and public policy. RPL, among other things, can and should be a way of recognizing 'knowledge claims that are different from and in some ways preferable to knowledge claims grounded in the lives of men in dominant groups' (Harding), as contemporary theory argues (Notes to Judy and Frances, no date).

This was a discourse that was not in any way constrained by departmental disciplinary technologies. It was outside these (as we were when we were theorising about what might be

possible)¹¹⁸. Interestingly, it was not a discourse of empowerment or agency on the part of ‘the oppressed’. Rather, it was a moral injunction on ‘the oppressors’ to act:

In any RPL process that requires a negotiation between cultures of knowledge, an implicit re-coding or translation occurs. While students will, of course, be gradually oriented to academic practices and while an extended RPL curriculum...serves as that orientation, it is the TEACHER and the ASSESSOR who must make the recodings/translations at this point [emphasis in original] (Email communication from Miriam to Judy on 30/10/97).

The above quotations embody all the contradictions around knowledge, pedagogy power and identity in RPL, as discussed in the Subject Review. On the one hand, knowledges are seen as different, subjugated or dominant, with RPL concerned with validating the former. On the other hand, (in the quotation immediately above) the pedagogy of RPL is seen as ‘re-coding’, ‘translation’ or ‘negotiation’ between ‘cultures of knowledge’, including an orientation to academic practices. This suggests something else altogether, but there are big differences between ‘re-coding’, ‘translation’ and ‘negotiation’, which are not explored. Furthermore, in this case, it is the teacher that has to do these things on behalf of the learner, who, it is envisaged can ‘catch-up’ once inside a mainstream programme. In the Subject Review, I argued that recognition of subjugated knowledge was frequently espoused, and translation frequently practiced (by those learners who can).

Our responses to Miriam’s discourse were ambivalent and defensive. In the notes from the sub-group meeting on 17/10/97, we argued that ‘her responses seemed to be interpretative of our intentions’ and we wondered whether she was ‘romanticising the SA context’. The notes

¹¹⁸ Perhaps it is within a particular reading of the discursive context of the ‘new South Africa’?

also raised our sense of lack of agency in the departmental context in the rather plaintive question, 'How possible is it to be "destabilising" rather than "reproductive" at [the university]?': 'Believing that experiential learning was productive of important knowledge and worthy of recognition is not necessarily synonymous with making that a reality in the face of recalcitrant and powerful forces and gatekeepers' (Notes from sub-group meeting on 17/10/97).

Existing technologies of power and of the self were intensified during the model building phase, as in the establishment of the sub-group and the agreement. These were not (experienced as) solely prohibitive as they accelerated the pace of apprenticeship.

Departmental discourses came strongly to the fore in the hypotheses, objectives and research questions established for the piloting stage. This suggests that interactions with *the department* through meetings etc. located us (as apprentices) closer to the dominant discourse. The engagement of a visiting professor brought a new and disturbing set of discourses into play. These were a more sophisticated version of the discourse that the project had entertained in its early stages. This occasioned a crisis of identity for the apprentices. Miriam's position bore many of the hallmarks of critical theory and was concerned with a practical intervention in relation to the diploma not a research intervention. The discourse also carried moral and disciplinary overtones – an injunction to be 'radical' not 'reactionary' or 'racist'. As project workers we were therefore positioned at the intersection of two competing discourses, both of which carried sanctions.

A significant activity in the model building stage was a *workshop* for the whole department with the aim of generating RPL assessment criteria¹¹⁹. Data from that workshop is now analysed in detail.

The departmental workshop and the RPL pilot

This one-day workshop involved all members of the department. It centred on one of the objectives for the model building and piloting stage of the project: ‘Explore the devising of access criteria for the diploma.’ There were four activities:

1. Introduction and scene setting.
2. Exploring the RPL concept.
3. Exploring the existing M+3 and certificate entry routes to the diploma.
4. Evaluating the above entry routes as a basis for establishing criteria for assessing RPL candidates.

After some introductory analysis of how the workshop was set up and managed, each of the above activities will be analysed in turn.

A contested space

Miriam, Frances and I planned the workshop. A crucial decision was that I chair the meeting. Roy and Frances chose to be ‘wearing their departmental hats’ rather than their ‘project hats’, which effectively distanced them from involvement in debates about the project. Miriam was

¹¹⁹ Not the documentary analysis approach planned earlier.

positioned as 'process commentator'. All the other academics were 'workshop participants'. A mixture of activities was designed: whole group discussion, small group activities and feedback/plenary sessions.

There is no doubt that the workshop occasioned much debate. As Frances says, 'I found it quite a contested space, quietly contested, in a funny way'. Evidence suggests two causes for this, in addition to the content of the workshop. First: *Judy as chair*. Interview data suggest that this role interfered with 'normal' workings of the department. Frances notes how that under normal circumstances, Robert or James would have led or chaired any departmental workshop: 'Now suddenly they weren't playing those roles'. Instead they were repositioned as 'learners' and rendered more visible in the process:

It was having to negotiate with the department in a new way. There was a sense – not quite learners – but they were having to reveal a side of themselves that shifted power to some extent, or potentially...I just remember this one scene, bent over, a bit like a workshop, bent over this table with some newsprint there and kind of drawing these things and there was Robert, you know, *Robert*...

She emphasises how unsettling this 'new way' of 'negotiating' was and how much discomfort it engendered, referring to 'safety' and 'disembedding' from familiar mores (for Robert and James and for others in the department): 'it wasn't a completely safe space for *the department* in a way – *they* [Robert and James] didn't like it...I actually found it a funny small group exercise...It was quite a disembedding exercise for all of us in many ways...'

Joyce raises another dimension of discomfort pertaining to James particularly. She says that he had a 'whole thing about workshops' and had written a paper which critiqued contemporary

workshops and argued that their function had changed. For him, in the struggle era (according to Joyce), ‘workshops were about a whole lot of things’, but they had since become ‘an oppressive technique in themselves – the discourse technologies going on in them act in repressive ways now and so “the workshop” has turned around on itself’. This view raises interesting issues about ‘the workshop’ as an intensification of technologies of power (particularly surveillance) and the potential for vast disparities between espoused rationales and how practices operate as revealed by analysis. For example, claims that workshops are by definition democratic, egalitarian and relaxing could be counterpoised with arguments that they make participants more visible and vulnerable, that they require disclosure and participation and that facilitators’ powers are hidden but potent.

Joyce is also the most outspoken about the tensions that surfaced as a result of my chairing the workshop¹²⁰:

What I find interesting in that [Judy as chair] is that maybe she [Miriam] went for that sort of methodology because she knew it would bring out all the struggles and tensions. It was almost like the ‘workshop as text’. It would allow those things to surface, and they did...All those feelings of power and gender and disempowerment and uncertainty and uneasiness....

Frances is of the view that my chairing was ‘closest to a direct challenge’ because I was ‘actually challenging the discourse quite directly by chairing and facilitating... because you had to pull the pieces together. You had to make sense of it in particular ways’. However, later in the interview, she qualifies this and suggests that it was a dummy challenge: ‘It was

¹²⁰ Her view links to earlier analysis where I claimed that she was the most critical about apprenticeship in the department and about the concept of RPL.

supposedly a more equal footing because we were all in it together. But we weren't really. We all kind of knew that'.

Analysis, then, suggests that my chairing did interfere with departmental social practices, identity positions and power relations. It was a significant departure for me to be in an authority position. My own sense was of being subjected to more intense scrutiny than usual. I became isolated as the 'visible apprentice'. The role of chair did not change the nature of my primary identity in the department. As such I was still reactive; whereas Robert and James, for example, were still active.

The second cause of the workshop being a contested space was *Miriam's presence*. Evidence suggests that this also impacted on conventional circulations of power in the department and, in so doing, increased the discomfort level. For Frances, Miriam was 'an outsider, who the department knew had a very specific view of the [RPL] process'. She says: 'having Miriam there I think was perhaps useful but also perhaps set some of the tone of discomfort to an extent'. Frances has a sense of Miriam observing and surveying the workings of the department (and the project), and of requiring verbalisations of tacit practices and value systems: 'I think she was herself trying to understand and therefore to get the department to make explicit what it was they were about...'

There was also a discursive challenge to do with Miriam's 'particular understanding of knowledge and of learning and of RPL which in a sense added a challenge to the department' (Frances). This was all the greater because of Miriam's senior academic status. Joyce captured the gender aspects: 'the authority lying with the men and Miriam came in and disrupted that a

bit'. Frances captures the contractual stratifications in the department and Miriam's 'kudos', 'credibility' and ability to disturb:

It [Miriam's contribution] challenged that level of departmental canon which I as a...contract, junior member of staff had never felt party to and never felt confident with. And yet, here was Miriam who had all the kudos and all the credibility to some extent, in terms of her knowledge etc., being able to challenge...I almost want to say that I felt it was a professorial debate happening which we would never have been party to in the department....

These issues of surveillance, of making tacit and implicit discourses and associated social practices visible, of intellectual challenge and disrupted lines of authority will be further analysed in the context of each activity.

Activity 1: Introduction and scene setting

In this activity, some context for the day was provided via a recap of project work to date and presentation of hypotheses, objectives and research questions for model building and piloting. This generated a lot of critique.

The project's use of the term 'agency' was critiqued. I was asked what it meant and how it was to be used in developing RPL. I responded by saying that its importance sprang 'from a critique of the notion of acquisition as either "in" or "out" of the discourse¹²¹ and what about the movements in between?' (Notes from departmental workshop: 1). I was suggesting that some notion of agency might be useful in exploring this. Criticisms took several forms. First,

¹²¹ As mentioned, derived from James Gee's work on primary and secondary discourses.

Sharda¹²² maintained that learners' have 'agencies' rather than 'agency', and that agency in the workplace does not translate into agency in the academy: 'Sharda added that many students who score low marks in the Diploma and who are quite under-confident in the class are extremely resourceful, sought after and often in leadership positions in their places of work' (Notes from departmental workshop: 1).

Secondly, it was suggested that the project had a psychological view of discourse which was being linked to agency, implying 'that discourses are moved into peoples' heads rather than embodied in institutions and social practices: 'the places where discourses are reproduced are in practices (and not in people)' (James, notes from departmental workshop:1-2). Here he was correcting the project's conceptual misapprehensions.

Thirdly, Miriam saw agency being used in conservative ways. In a later commentary, captured in the workshop notes, she proposed:

...that an interesting distinction around 'learner agency' seemed to be emerging: whether we see learner agency as helping facilitate access (epistemological) and success into existing and hegemonic (and institutional) discourses or whether agency could be seen to be about creating a space for non-hegemonic discourses to become visible (Notes from departmental workshop: 2).

Her own position on RPL was foregrounded in the latter option, which she substantiated as follows:

¹²² A lecturer in the department.

I'm not sure whether it is right to maintain the tension between agency as the recognition of subjugated knowledges and agency as assimilation into hegemonic knowledge practices. As a concept within contemporary post colonialist and feminist discourses, agency refers very specifically to the (re)gaining and (re)claiming of political and epistemological efficacy on the part of oppressed groups. I think we need to allow it to retain its association with subjugated knowledges rather than hegemonic ones. Not to do so runs the risk, first, of co-opting the concept for conservative ends and, second, of having the work mean everything and therefore nothing (Notes from departmental workshop: 2).

The above quotations illuminate the nature of Miriam's discursive challenge to the department and to the RPL project. Our erroneous notion of agency seems to have provided a vehicle for discursive contestation to surface. Miriam was arguing from a position of the knowledge demands and claims of the oppressed, about which a straightforward political choice can be made. Robert took issue with the possibility of political choice:

He thought that the tension is important and that agency cannot be restricted to Miriam's terms without a serious simplification of the RPL project – which is precisely about the relationship between subjugated knowledge and dominant knowledge, not a simple counter-paradigm of subjugated knowledge (Notes from departmental workshop: 2).

These quotations are very significant because they polarise two approaches to RPL. First, a practical intervention based on 'political commitment to subjugated knowledges'; secondly, a research intervention based on 'relationships between knowledges'. These discussions subjected the project to two competing discourses. There were moves to (re)establish departmental discourses and intellectual norms, and to exclude other ways of thinking. There is evidence to suggest that the project was out of step with both, which is why James's

question about the nature of the project's political and theoretical agenda is telling. As Rosy says, the 'project was maybe seeking that' (a political and theoretical agenda) through the workshop.

Activity 2: Exploring the RPL concept

This activity was undertaken in two groups around two questions:

1. What do you see as the social functions of RPL?
2. What excites you and worries you about RPL given that the department is now a site for research?

Notes from the meeting reveal that a wide range of *political* and *pedagogical* issues were raised – mostly negative. *Political* issues included whether RPL was about appeasement or serious engagement with political and institutional change; whether it was about redress (individual or social) or new (more invisible, hidden and entrenched) forms of exclusion; whether RPL was about access to what exists or about destabilising what exists; whose language/discourse would be dominant, that of the students or the institution; whether RPL would perpetuate a modernist myth of mobility in the guise of experience + academic qualification = mobility. The *pedagogic* concerns were about RPL contesting existing pedagogic authority and epistemological definitions; problems with notions of 'equivalency' between forms of knowledge when written assessment dominates in the diploma programme; and being explicit about criteria weakening those that exist implicitly. Although presented as problems, these matters were also seen as interesting challenges.

The activity was essentially a classification exercise, about RPL being ‘this’ or ‘that’, with classifying principles derived from the dominant discourse. Overall, data suggest that this activity was the least contested of the day. It is a good example of the critical sociological element of the departmental discourse in action¹²³. Like ‘hosting’, problematisation and demystification were comfortable modes for *the department*. This convergence seemed also to have included Miriam who commented later that:

The concerns expressed went to the heart of the social dynamics at the heart of RPL: would it simply be an appeasement mechanism or a real reform; would it simply perpetuate a myth of social mobility and, in so doing, simply make exclusion more invisible. On the other hand, it was acknowledged that, to be an instrument of social change, RPL had implications for the power structures of the university that, as Robert put it, have previously maintained uncontested boundaries. Similarly, if it was to be a vehicle for granting visibility to subjugated knowledges what would this mean for the rule-systems and boundary systems within an academic program such as the...diploma? (Email correspondence between Miriam and Judy on 30/10/97).

While there was a degree of consensus at this level, it was at the level of strategy and consequences that the disagreements lay (see analysis below). What, for example, does ‘implications for the power structures of the university’ mean in practice? And how amenable were the ‘rule-systems and boundary systems’ of the diploma to changes instigated by RPL? How was ‘real reform’ seen? Was the view that RPL could (or should) be an instrument of social change a shared view? Was it accepted that ‘granting visibility to subjugated knowledges’ was what *the department* saw as its reconstructive project?

¹²³ A sort of ideology critique.

Activity 3: Exploring the existing entry routes to the diploma

This was the major activity of the day, designed to begin to elicit the assessment criteria for the pilot. It was the one that caused most contestation since it focused directly on departmental teaching programmes and practices. As Rosy comments: 'it is possibly also the first time that the diploma curriculum had been so publicly subjected to scrutiny and dismemberment – certainly in my time'. For Frances it is about focusing on the 'micro': 'But now suddenly we were asking people to go much more micro and I think that was very uncomfortable for a lot of people...'

The activity was set up around four questions:

1. What tend to be the main configurations of practitioner roles and/or kinds of practice that students entering the diploma by the M+3 and the certificate routes come with?
2. From what sites of practice do students entering by the M+3 and certificate routes mainly come?
3. How do practitioner roles and/or kinds of practice relate to sites of practice?
4. What forms of knowledge are likely to underpin the students' practitioner roles and/or kinds of practices in context?

Robert immediately raised a concern. As James notes: 'I can remember him looking quizzical and rolling his pencil in his fingers – and I thought "phew"...' ¹²⁴. Robert's issue was that the exercise 'silenced' the diploma curriculum, and yet for him, 'RPL seemed to be advocating curriculum changes powerfully'. Robert linked discussion about curriculum to the notion of 'failure' and is reported as arguing:

¹²⁴ An instance of the symbolic power of the authority figure and dominant discourse.

...if we are saying 'no' [that people cannot fail RPL] then this defers failure to the curriculum which puts powerful pressure on it for change through accommodation next year. In other words RPL breaches prevailing course boundary rules with deferred consequences (Notes from departmental workshop: 5).

I would argue that Robert's reaction was strong because he experienced the pilot as transgressing the boundary between research and practical intervention, and the agreements and positions that had been taken up earlier. After some debate it was agreed that 'discussion on curricular discourses and authority should be held' in favour of a discussion on entry routes via 'a discussion on the life worlds of students'. The results of the exercise are synthesised from the workshop notes as Figure 3.

Workshop group 1	Role/kind of practice	Site of practice	Forms of knowledge
M+3s	Emphasis on formal student role	The academy	Vertical knowledges 'obeying institutional rules'
Certificate students	Emphasis on practitioner roles (teaching and design)	Development and social action – NGOs, unions, employment	Learners do not necessarily have access to specialised languages
Workshop group 2			
M+3s	Emphasis on design and manager-educator roles in professional contexts OR Academic role with little or no teaching experience Re-professionalising (dis)positioning	Formal and formalising	Academic first and foremost. Experiential secondary
Certificate students	Emphasis on design and teaching - educator roles in 'community' contexts	Non-formal and/or formalising	Experiential first and foremost. Academic secondary

Figure 3: Exploring the existing entry routes to the diploma.

Although the above can be seen as an exercise in classification, and somewhat over-totalising in its assumptions about *all* certificate students and *all* M+3 students, the two workshop groups made a range of mitigating points: that 'both groups of learners have differences within them'; that 'M+3s have a history of formal education but different e.g. those with professional qualifications' as opposed to academic qualifications; that 'with certificate students much depended on the site of practice e.g. work position occupied, history of active political engagement' (Notes from departmental workshop: 6). There is a high degree of convergence between the two groups' findings. The formal and academic nature of the diploma is particularly well highlighted.

The centrality of text

Returning to the aim of the activity which was to elicit criteria: a key criterion emerged:

...the centrality of *text* as a similarity (yet with key differences) between the characteristics of students, the textual range of the two groups being different:

- M+3: the capacity to entertain provisonality of knowledges, capacity to envisage alternative texts as opposed to one text;
- Certificate: text is *real*, textual range not so wide, students not so confident in seeing competing readings of the world;

But also need to remember that factors other than Cert and M+3 routes impact on textual view of the world e.g. religion, gender, experience of/in particular organisations....An important issue for most of the group was the point that the M+3s tend to have the ability to understand the *self as text* whereas the Certificate students are embedded in the real and thus *the self is real* (Notes from departmental workshop: 6).

Self as text versus *self as real* became, as Rosy puts it, a 'defining moment' of the activity and of the workshop as a whole. For her: 'The most memorable moment for me was when James said that he thinks that what learners need to do is to be able to see themselves as text. And Miriam freaked. She found that very offensive...' But, in James's own words:

'Self as text' was a stunning formulation, it really was. Because that was the transfer from practice, from the self as an operational self in a context, to producing the self as text for the scrutiny of examiners....And 'self as text' needs to be an inter-text basically, rather than a single text....

Defining moment it may have been, but the concept was less than clear, as was Miriam's reaction to it. Rosy saw her as 'freaked' whereas James saw her as 'being a little bit frightened of the idea of text, but interested as well'. The term seemed to refer to the shift in identity from practitioner to learner, and a particular kind of learner. As a potential criterion for access via RPL, it was drawn only from one person's perception of characteristics of M+3 students. It held the potential of being a powerful technique of exclusion, for those in the 'real world'.

Whatever the status of self as text, it was publicly acknowledged during the workshop that 'the curriculum of the diploma privileges the ability to work with formal texts' (Notes from departmental workshop: 6), and that 'prior academic learning is particularly privileged' (Notes from departmental workshop: 7)¹²⁵. Text, then, became central to the development of RPL assessment criteria, in the form of changing identity (self as text) and academic texts (textual abilities).

¹²⁵ This triangulates earlier analysis of discourses of the teaching programmes.

The centrality of design

A further criterion, 'design of learning interventions' was also seen as 'central to both routes (a grounding condition)', though, as with text, contextualised differently for certificate and for M+3 students. Both textual abilities and design abilities were seen by the workshop as providing resources for the devising of RPL criteria.

Evidence suggests that, in foregrounding 'text' and 'design', the existing diploma curriculum was far from silenced. Robert's active participation in these discussions shaped the outcomes of the activity. The diploma and its values and discourses were repositioned as central.

However, some previously tacit assumptions about learners were made explicit during this activity, particularly the differences between the two groups of entrants. Alongside this was the making explicit of the implicit values attached to academic abilities and to a particular sort of learner identity. Like 'agency', 'self as text' was a vehicle that surfaced discursive divisions in the workshop, in this case, polarised between Miriam and James. In this way, the workshop did 'successfully' put pressure on the department to be explicit about (verbalise and disclose) implicit practices and values.

Activity 4: Evaluating existing entry routes as a basis for establishing criteria for assessing RPL candidates

Contestations continued in this activity. Rosy is reported as attempting to address the potential exclusions associated with privileging 'text' as a criterion:

Rosy then returned us briefly to the...importance of texts (reading and writing) in the diploma and felt that we need to accept the diverse nature of text (written and oral, for example) and the specific ways in which texts can be dealt with, as this will have an effect on assessment. If we try and grapple with that question then it opens up the possibility for curriculum change and puts a challenge to the department (Notes from departmental workshop: 8).

Likewise, Miriam is reported as saying:

The M+3s and the certificate graduates are each extremely diverse and overlapping groups. Similarly, RPL students will bring different skills depending on their experiential backgrounds. Trade unionists will often have argumentation skills, awareness of inhabiting power-laden discourse and experience in organising and summarising classroom discussions. Male Muslim students and students with strong political backgrounds will often understand the power of classical texts and have experience in interpretation and application of textual ideas (Notes from departmental workshop: 6).

Both were recommending a broad interpretation of 'text' and 'textual ability' as a way of countering what they saw as the imposition of a diploma-derived definition limited to academic abilities. This, they argued, would provide a basis for the pilot to challenge the diploma curriculum (which was precisely what Robert and James did not want). Though interesting, this did not further the task of deriving criteria, which was left incomplete. No firm decisions were made, but text and design were signalled, and possibilities raised for a broad interpretation of them. This left the project with the problem of what to do about criteria. As Roy remarks in his interview: 'I think we had difficulty getting there...there was a sense of dissatisfaction. We weren't able at the end of the day to say "that's it". There was this kind of unfinished mess at the end of the day'.

The main thing to emerge from the final two activities of the workshop was the extreme resistance in the department to any intervention into the diploma curriculum. However, what the workshop did (perhaps for the first time ever) was to open up a departmental discussion about the diploma, if only at the level of the characteristics of students entering it. This was enough to provoke very strong responses from senior academics. Drawing on Bernstein's theories, Robert 'disclosed' that the existing diploma curriculum was in collection rather than integrated code, and that this presented research opportunities:

He [Robert] felt that we needed to consider the implications for RPL under each of these conditions and felt that RPL was going to be more difficult under collection code...He therefore felt it was important to research curriculum modality in relation to RPL (Notes from departmental workshop: 8).

The workshop as a whole surfaced many knowledge, pedagogy, power and identity issues. I make claims in four thematic areas:

Increased surveillance

The shifting of roles (me in the chair, Robert and James as participants) and Miriam's presence in the family group seemed to intensify patterns of surveillance in several directions. The most 'sacred' practices of *the department* were under scrutiny from the project and from Miriam. This was 'successful' in that *the department* disclosed some of its tacit practices - for example, perspectives on the life worlds of students at entry and the collection nature of the

curriculum¹²⁶. The RPL project was under the scrutiny of the department and of Miriam, and attempts were made from both sides to normalise and discipline ‘inappropriate’ project thinking. Like Robert’s and James’s, Miriam’s was a totalising discourse (as in ‘I think we need...’¹²⁷).

Competing discourses

Two powerful discourses communicated with each other through the project: the departmental discourse (curriculum sociology) and the radical discourse reintroduced by Miriam (with postmodernism reargounded within it). Each discursive position embodied actual or reported critique of the other. Miriam saw the departmental discourse as conservative. Frances suggests that she also saw the dominant discourse as masculinist: ‘I think she might not have used that term but I think that she would have been critiquing it to some extent from a feminist epistemology...a feminist epistemology challenging a male dominant view of knowledge...’

Robert’s critique of Miriam’s discourse ran along the following lines. First, that she was ‘too radical’: ‘I would have viewed Miriam in one sense as too radical. And also as not taking account, not just of the power of the institution, but the resources of the institution, if it were primarily about subjugated knowledge being recognised’. Secondly, that a radical discourse around subjugated knowledges over-simplified the RPL project, which for him was about ‘relationships between knowledges’. There was a conflict of social projects here, between a project of widening access and the diploma project of sponsored mobility. Robert respected the richness Miriam brought to the debates in the department by polarising them: ‘But Miriam was useful because she polarised RPL for us, vividly I think...between subjugated knowledge

¹²⁶ This was a helpful clue for apprentices.

¹²⁷ Who are the ‘we’ here?

being recognised, and therefore subjugated people being recognised, and a coaching programme for an existing course’.

Although Miriam pointed out that valuing subjugated knowledges involves curriculum change, the radical-postmodern discourse lacks a pedagogic dimension and a theory of curriculum, which makes it difficult to engage with the practicality of such change. What is clear is that the discourse of subjugated knowledges is a political and moral discourse. The project was seeking to find a discursive home but found itself sandwiched between (subjected to) the above two positions, in a context where other practices also held powerful sway, such as systems of discursive apprenticeship and family allegiances.

New discursive attachments?

Analysis suggests that Miriam’s project in South Africa was primarily a political one. Part of this involved the building of strategic alliances within the department in relation to this particular pilot. Robert says that he felt she saw him ‘as open to persuasion or manipulation depending on how you see it: I would like to think persuasion!’ There is evidence to suggest that Rosy also felt herself part of a strategic alliance agenda: ‘I empathised or sympathised with some of Miriam’s positions... She wanted me to come on board with her project, sort of challenging the department and I really didn’t want to do that’. Instead, Rosy opted for partial alignment and sought a compromise identity position, as ‘message carrier’ across and between the discourses of the RPL research project, the diploma and the radical challenge:

...maybe if anything I was playing the role of boundary worker between those three – carrying little messages from one project to the other. Judy: The three being? Rosy: The research

project itself. The teaching project. And the critical challenge project. I kind of understood all of them enough...

Speaking for myself, I experienced 'a crisis of subjectivities', as the 'visible apprentice' with pressure to align in both directions. Analysis will bear this out, but ultimately, no one in the department or the project aligned with Miriam, although much of my work since has been in search of rapprochement.

Continuities

The above analysis suggests that the well-worn discursive pathways of power relations in departmental life prevailed. During the workshop, there were normalising pressures on the project in terms of the theoretical underpinnings of some of its hypotheses, objectives and research questions, and of distancing the project from the diploma curriculum. For Robert (from a formal/inductive perspective), a weakening of the boundaries around knowledge structures would not necessarily contribute to greater equity, and so the existing formal and inductive discourse and curriculum held firm. Instead, curriculum was signalled as an area for research. As Robert moved from general critique mode to inhabiting his formal/inductive /master discourse, his subject position changed – from the joy of intellectual enquiry to a more gate-keeping and disciplining stance.

The formal and inductive discourse held firm but was perhaps temporarily displaced and reconfigured for a while as a result of direct discussion of normally tacit matters, my chairing of the meeting, and Miriam's presence. Frances's view is that 'the traditional boundaries were

drawn more strongly because of [Miriam's presence]'. She felt that this led Robert and James to 'push the more traditional because of the indirect silent challenge sitting there'. She expresses the nature of the workshop's challenge to the department in terms of circles and ice-cubes:

If you imagine that those were the boundaries before the planning of the RPL process – imagine that as a circle, and then the circle scatters and becomes a broken circle, temporarily suspended, not quite knowing how it's going to reset. Then it resets and it sets slightly differently. So, it had a moment of moving out and kind of back, not dislodged. The planning I think hadn't disrupted things completely...It's almost like an ice-cube. The ice-cube when it sets in a particular shape, then when it melts and resets, it's never quite the same. Something like that. I think that's what happened. I think that planning allowed it to open and sit open uncertainly for a while but it was still water – it was still, I sense, at the end, the same basically.

Through shifting roles and identity positions, authority was enacted differently. But the normal workings of discursive power were ultimately reinscribed.

The department and the pilot (continued)

There are documentary data pertaining to three meetings between the departmental workshop and the beginning of the pilot. The PWG RPL sub-group met on 31/10/97 and 2/12/97. There is also a progress report to the full PWG on 17/11/97. Discussion mainly focused on recruitment strategy and assessment criteria¹²⁸.

¹²⁸ There was some discussion about curriculum design. These data are analysed in the next chapter.

Recruitment

Targeted recruitment was undertaken to supplement the traditional departmental publicity brochure. Using departmental mailing-lists and networks of past students, organisations were identified which might have prospective RPL candidates. These were a mixture of NGOs, industry training boards, and private sector organisations (with affirmative action policies). Prior to sending out information, telephone contact was made with each organisation to ask who was responsible for training and development, to explain the nature of the pilot and whom it was aiming to recruit. The latter was defined as educators and trainers with:

...substantial experience including teaching/training and programme design but who do not meet the 'normal' entry requirements i.e. M+3 or having undergone the Department's two-year Certificate programme. Such candidates would most likely be people with middle to upper management potential within their organisation (RPL information sheet).

A personal touch was apparent in the covering letter, which invited interested people to contact us or invite us to visit the organisation. A number of people contacted us. The response was good, although several applicants were recommended to apply for direct access to the diploma (Project progress report 5: 3/12/97). It is interesting to consider in race and gender terms those who responded to the publicity. The three black (African) women who expressed an interest were referred directly to the diploma because, having degrees and experience, they were qualified for direct access. Three white women and one white man applied for RPL. They 'read' the text of RPL and positioned themselves (correctly) as suitable candidates in

that they did not have the required formal qualifications¹²⁹. Two coloured women candidates applied, came to an orientation day, and subsequently withdrew¹³⁰. They were both suitable candidates. In addition, we canvassed four people who had applied for the certificate programme, judging that they had 'middle to upper management potential'. These were one white woman, one coloured woman, one coloured man, and one African man, three of whom chose the RPL option rather than the certificate.

The above analysis suggests that those who presented themselves most accurately as RPL candidates were from more advantaged sectors of society. As one of the RPL candidates said: 'I think you have to have a certain level of confidence in your own capabilities and achievements to have applied for RPL in the first place'. In this small sample, no African who met the criteria responded. Instead, those who responded were already qualified and able to access the diploma directly. This suggests that a different recruitment strategy is required.

I would argue that selection was coded into recruitment. What, for example, was inscribed in the suggestion that candidates 'would most likely be people with middle to upper management potential within their organisation'? Evidence suggests that the phrase was included as an attempt to meet the design criterion that came from the departmental workshop. However, this could be an example of RPL trading on implicit or explicit organisational selection processes, raising questions about the subjectivities and capacities which were implicitly being privileged - for example, formal education, high levels of motivation, 'stickability', textual abilities, disciplined by organisational life, etc. Furthermore, the pilot recruited through known organisations and individuals that were already part of the department's network. These

¹²⁹ One was a borderline RPL candidate in that he had already attained five credits of a ten-credit degree (one of which was at level 3).

¹³⁰ One for personal reasons, one on account of funding.

reflected the department's history and practices, especially during the eighties, and so included a substantial number of community organisations and NGOs (those that remained). The pilot therefore remained within departmental frames of reference and communication channels.

What would have happened if we had used local radio, for example?

Developing assessment criteria

Documentary data suggest that 'design' and 'text' were used to develop criteria. A first draft was presented to the PWG meeting on 17/11/97 and another to the sub-group on 2/12/97. It is interesting to note the academic drift. For example, in the 'text' criteria: 'understand and make sense of texts and tasks' became 'understand and make sense of texts and tasks (including academic texts/tasks)'. The design-related criteria are worth recording here as some of them were dropped from the final draft:

Design

- ability in the practitioner roles¹³¹ that cluster under 'design';
- understanding the knowledge bases that are drawn on (contextual, ETD and subject expertises) and how they are drawn on in context;
- ability to understand why design choices were made, to identify design problems (the relationship between ideal and reality) and suggest strategies;
- ability to reflect critically on own practice including placing it within a larger historical and social context and understanding own choices and assumption (Notes for sub-group of PWG meeting on 2/12/97).

¹³¹ These drew from the ETDP project.

These criteria are about far more than design – critical reflection and social and contextual location, for example. Clearly, a particular academic orientation was privileged.

The notes from the sub-group meeting on 2/12/97 report that the group recommended we revisit the design criteria. The question was asked as to the purpose of confirming practitioner-related learning from experience when it was assumed but not foregrounded in the diploma. Robert is reported as saying that the design criteria as they stood had a ‘technological’ feel about them, and the project should rather ‘find ways to make the background or “habitus” explicit that students draw on in order to do design’ (Notes from PWG sub-group on 2/12/97). Rosy is reported as supporting that argument:

...it was not so much ‘design’ that must be foregrounded but rather the capacities/abilities implied by design. Students who might never have had the opportunity to design might still have very good planning, strategic thinking and organising skills, crucial in any design process (Notes from PWG sub-group on 2/12/97).

What was presented here was the idea that we should ‘go behind’ the design criteria in search of more inclusive abilities. However, what happened in practice was that the design criterion was as good as dropped altogether. Practitioner-related learning was collapsed into critical reflection with an emphasis on the relationship between practice and context and on appreciating the context specificity of practice. The final set of criteria was as follows:

Drawing on the roles of lifelong learner, adult education practitioner and potential HE learner:

The ability to:

- understand/make sense of texts and tasks (including academic texts);
- reflect critically on own practice including:
 - seeing/locating it within its larger historical and social context;
 - seeing the way in which context shapes the choices and decisions that are made about practice (and own assumptions);
 - identifying and analysing problems/issues and posing alternative strategies drawing on contextual understandings;
 - seeing the relationships between ideal and reality;
- make connections and develop arguments and propositions;
- contrast and compare texts with own learning from experience;
- entertain provisionality;
- express the above as a coherent text which could include:
 - summarising;
 - analysing and evaluating (theorising);
 - structuring, developing and illustrating arguments and propositions.

Figure 4: RPL assessment criteria.

The above criteria clearly privilege conventional academic abilities as in ‘summarising’, ‘reflecting critically’, ‘developing arguments and propositions’, writing ‘a coherent text’, and ‘structuring arguments’ in writing. They also mirror departmental discourses in their critical sociological orientation (references to ‘historical and social context’) and even more particularistically embody a postmodern tone in ‘entertaining provisionality’. Thus, although, as reported in a PSC report, the idea was to develop ‘criteria that attest to practitioner abilities

in design, and learner abilities in working with texts' (Project progress report 5: 3), this receded.

The criteria confirmed non-engagement with the diploma curriculum. Frances echoes this in her interview. She says that in the earlier planning stages, there was a chance for 'RPL to do some quite radical moves' but as time went on the 'context-specific nature of RPL practice loomed large, became much more part of my understanding...as a social practice and social practices are contextualised etc and there's power'¹³².

¹³² Compare with her earlier radical aspirations for RPL as potentially being about confrontational challenge 'in a positive way'.

CHAPTER SEVEN:

BERNSTEINIAN ANALYSIS OF KNOWLEDGE, PEDAGOGY, POWER AND IDENTITY IN THE CURRICULUM DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RPL PILOT

Introduction

This chapter of Bernsteinian analysis follows from the Foucauldian analysis of the negotiation and initial design of the RPL pilot. It is concerned with the curriculum design and implementation of RPL. I pursue the following theoretically-informed lines of enquiry:

- What knowledge structures constitute candidates' prior experiential knowledge?
- What is the knowledge structure of RPL? And of the receiving programme?
- What is the nature of the pedagogic discourse of RPL?
- What pedagogic identities and forms of consciousness does RPL privilege?
- How does all of the above affect candidates from different social groupings? What, therefore, is the social project of RPL? How does the micro pedagogic moment connect to broader (societal) power structures?

There are three parts to the chapter:

1. The recontextualisation of resources into an RPL curriculum.
2. The delivery of the RPL curriculum.

3. Relationships between knowledges.

Analysis draws on all interviews. As discussed in the Research Design chapter, candidate interviews were undertaken on two occasions – four months after RPL and three years after the process¹³³. The analysis also draws on documentary data:

- notes pertaining to curriculum planning meetings;
- notes pertaining to PWG RPL subgroup meetings;
- RPL curriculum materials;
- RPL candidates' portfolios;

The recontextualisation of resources into an RPL curriculum

The last chapter of analysis addressed ways in which a curricular approach to RPL was conceptualised. Various theories had been explored as possible resources, particularly the work of Vygotsky. This work was not itself to be recontextualised into the RPL curriculum, but was to provide an intellectual basis for planning. This suggests that we (as researchers, curriculum designers/planners and forthcoming facilitators) had 'decided' that such perspectives were useful and commensurate with our sense (at that time) of the departmental discourse. Vygotsky's zone of proximal development, 'scaffolding' and social theories of learning had been foregrounded as providing an alternative to experiential learning theory and practice, as a basis for RPL. The actual design of the RPL curriculum took place during October and November 1997 supported by the PWG RPL subgroup.

¹³³ References are made when data are drawn from the first interview and the group focus interview. Where no reference is made, data is drawn from the second interview. The consequences of the time/hindsight issues are addressed where relevant.

Curriculum design

A criteria-led curriculum design process?

Documentary data suggest that the design of the RPL curriculum was led by the assessment criteria that had been developed. The following extract from a PWG meeting illustrates how the criteria were used to create a heuristic device for curriculum planning which was framed by ‘abilities’:

The above criteria combined to impact on our own design process for the RPL curriculum in the following way:-

- Ability to undertake and problematise own design and teaching practice.
- Ability to construct (write) a text to explain, defend etc own design – CENTRAL.
- Ability to work with (read) texts to inform the above (Notes from PWG meeting on 17/11/97).

It is significant that the relationship between criteria and curriculum was not articulated at the time. It was raised by one of the members of the sub-group in the meeting on 2/12/97. She expressed a concern that the relationship was ‘not clear to her’. However, the above reference to ‘impact on’ suggests that the criteria were poised to *prescribe* the curriculum, though largely tacitly.

A (con)textual approach

In the early stages of RPL curriculum design, the idea was to use pre-selected *contexts* or *texts* as a central ‘problem-solving environment’. This was based on earlier discussions in the PWG meetings and that there:

...seemed to be agreement that we select (con)texts to work with as starting point rather than rely on individuals’ selection of critical/significant learning, e.g. the election, examples of education policy, evaluation of a literacy project...This involves us in generating a specific problem-solving environment which allows for prior learning to be demonstrated and maximized/enhanced (Notes from PWG meeting on 17/11/97).

The deployment of a problem-solving environment through which to demonstrate and enhance prior learning marks a departure from standard approaches as discussed in the Subject Review. Having texts at all, rather than working solely with the ‘raw material’ of experience via Kolb’s learning cycle, increased the classification strength of this RPL practice. Introducing texts was an act of power – setting up boundaries to stem the flow of prior experiential knowledge into the RPL process (ironically enough). Texts also imply instruction (and induction?).

At the outset, we¹³⁴ selected as the (con)text a conference paper by university-based adult educators about an ‘unsuccessful’ adult literacy intervention. Each RPL candidate was to identify a ‘critical incident’ from their own adult educator practice and review it in the terms of the conference paper. Given the centrality of the writing ‘ability’, it was envisaged that candidates would produce three short texts about their incident. The production of three texts

¹³⁴ I use the term ‘we’ in preference to ‘I’. This does not imply that I hold Frances responsible for what I write.

was seen as giving candidates opportunities to evidence the three abilities outlined above (that is, problematise own design and teaching practice, write texts and read texts).

Disembedding from practice by theorising prior learning

Notes from the sub-group meeting on 2/12/97 document some of the departmental discussions around RPL curriculum. Our preparatory notes record that we were thinking about ways of 'uncovering prior learning and generating some new learning *to make the move from one style or type of learning to another*' [my emphasis]. During the meeting Robert was reported as saying that:

...what he believed was emerging was that the project needed to have a theory of progression or acquisition for RPL...Robert added that the theory of progression represents a movement from common-sense understandings towards more provisionality involving distancing and reflection. A process that happens as a social/educational process not just in relation to the diploma (Notes from PWG sub-group on 2/12/97: 2).

The above statement is a direct reflection of Robert's position on curriculum and learning – both are formal process of induction¹³⁵. It raises longstanding and vexed questions inherent in RPL (see Figure 1 in the Subject Review). Is it about recognising the same knowledge? Is it about translating between different forms of knowledge? Is it about acquiring new knowledge or is it about recognising subjugated knowledge? Is there a one-way bridge? If so, from where to where? Or is there a two-way bridge? Robert's view was that RPL should encourage a movement from prior learning to theorised learning with reflection as broker. This is the

¹³⁵ It also assumes that RPL candidates' prior learning will be located in the realm of common-sense or horizontal discourse. This will be explored in later analysis.

translation or new-learning type of RPL. His implicit question seems to have been that, if RPL is an educational process, then how is it any different from any other educational process? In other words, what is so special about RPL? A theme of 'disembedding' was discussed during the meeting as the means for candidates to move from familiar to unfamiliar (disembedding from practice). Our response was to link the notions of 'progression', 'distancing', 'disembedding' and 'reflection' to 'theorising', thereby continuing the process of academic drift identified in the last chapter: 'Our curriculum has taken this point on board and we will address ways of understanding experiential learning that include academic theorising of it' (Notes from PWG sub-group on 2/12/97). The principle of 'progression' led us away from the idea of one (con)text, and towards a series of (con)texts.

No curriculum challenge?

Notes from the sub-group meeting on 2/12/97 reported a concern about Frances and my closeness to the diploma. It was suggested that we had the diploma too foregrounded in our minds¹³⁶, 'both Judy and Frances know the courses well and are working directly on the project, "what comes into our minds and what doesn't?"' In a subsequent piece of data this closeness was seen as having the effect of 'holding the RPL process to ransom':

Robert said that he felt that while perhaps he understood why it [RPL] wasn't [a challenge to the diploma], this was a pity and possibly a 'missed opportunity'...There seemed, in other words, to be a general feeling that the dip course, and issues associated with it, was in a sense 'holding the RPL process to ransom' in various ways (Notes from PWG sub-group on 2/12/97: 3).

¹³⁶ An interesting contrast to the view in the departmental workshop that the diploma was silenced.

Furthermore, our curriculum-in-the-making was seen as shifting the onus of 'failure' onto candidates rather than using RPL to problematise the diploma curriculum and its requirements, 'Robert referred to the issue of "failure" that was discussed during the departmental workshop and said that it now seems that failure has been displaced to the learner' (Notes from PWG sub-group on 2/12/97: 3).

In a more interpretive vein, the continuing PWG meetings suggest that the departmental pedagogic discourse was impacting on what was 'thinkable' in terms of an RPL curriculum. As Atkinson (1995: 93) puts it, curriculum design was undertaken broadly within the 'discursive limits of what is and what is not legitimate knowledge'. However, the nagging question remained as to whether these meetings were not also presenting opportunities that (as apprentices) we could not 'read'. For example, the reference to 'failure' seemed to have been the meeting reflecting back to us the likely effect of the RPL evaluative rules. With the benefit of the above analysis, I would claim that we missed opportunities at two points, at least. First, we 'chose' to use the criteria to prescribe curriculum design, and secondly, we made a decision to use texts and therefore to erect knowledge boundaries around the RPL process.

On the other hand, as curriculum designers we had the authority to select *particular* texts for recontextualisation. In Bernstein's terms we were recontextualisation agents operating within realms of possibility and of constraint – within a recontextualising field influenced by the pedagogic discourse of the department. How did we exercise that power? According to what principles? To what end?

Analysis of the RPL curriculum resources

The following texts were the most significant curriculum resources. I shall analyse each in turn:

- a 'Quality Framework' from the ETDP project¹³⁷;
- an extract a book by Boud *et al.* (1993) 'Using Experience for Learning';
- a conference paper by Fotheringham *et al.* (1995) 'Adult Educators as Change Agents: Contributions to Social Transformation';
- an academic paper by Usher (1986) 'Adult Students and their Experience: Developing a Resource for Learning'.

The Quality Framework¹³⁸

The Education, Training and Development Practices (ETDP) project from which this resource was recontextualised was one of the first South African standards-setting research and development projects undertaken within the framework of the post-1994 dispensation. Although that project was firmly located in Bernstein's 'official recontextualising field' (ORF), most researchers were from the 'pedagogic recontextualising field' (PRF), i.e. university departments. Bernstein theorises that there are often tensions between the two, and this may have accounted for the disputes in the ETDP project. It may also have accounted for the holistic nature of the Quality Framework. For example, knowledge is included¹³⁹ as

¹³⁷ See Introduction.

¹³⁸ See Appendix D.

¹³⁹ It is often not included in performance-based vocational standards located more squarely within the ORF.

‘underpinning’ various forms of practice roles and ‘expertises’. All of the knowledges, in turn, were underpinned by the values and vision enshrined in the South African Constitution.

The Quality Framework was originally designed to inform national standards setting. In recontextualising it for the purposes of RPL, we were changing its function. To what? We used it to ‘celebrate’ prior learning. I shall analyse pedagogy in part two of this chapter, but argue at this point that the Quality Framework offered not only a useful heuristic map of the breadth of educator, trainer and development practitioner expertises, *but also* some cautions. For example, that expertises were not ‘complete’ unless underpinned by knowledge and a particular set of constitutional social democratic values. Basically, practice alone was not going to be enough. There were therefore tacit and hidden perspectives or principles at work here – namely, the importance of knowledge, an endorsement of the new national value system and, perhaps, a cautious endorsement of some ORF activities, especially those undertaken in collaboration with the PRF. I would argue that these principles contributed to the RPL pedagogic discourse.

An extract from Boud *et al.*

This text (reviewed in the Subject Review chapter) contains five ‘propositions’ about learning from experience:

Experience is the foundation of, and stimulus for, learning...

Learners actively construct their experience...

Learning is a holistic process...

Learning is socially and culturally constructed...

Learning is influenced by the socio-emotional context in which it occurs (Boud *et al.* 1993: 8-16).

Boud *et al.* substantiate each proposition in turn. For example, proposition one is substantiated by the following notions (amongst others): the centrality of experience in learning; all learning is experiential; new meanings can always be found in old experiences, and reflection is central to extracting meaning from experience, ‘...through entering into a dialogue with our experience...we can turn experiential knowledge, which may not be readily accessible to us, into propositional knowledge which can be shared and interrogated’ (p.10). There is a very Kolbian and mentalist assumption in this quotation - that reflection and dialoguing with experience *can* unproblematically translate it into formal knowledge. Here we see the linkage between the translation-type of RPL and Kolb which will be explored in relation to individual candidates in part three of this chapter.

Proposition two is substantiated by the view that meaning is person-dependent, which suggests agency in individual meaning-making: ‘Teachers and facilitators need to acknowledge the agency of the learner and the importance of the learner’s construction of the learning activities which they make available for them’ (p.11). Proposition three is substantiated in the following way, ‘...all learning involves the feelings and emotions (affective), the intellectual and cerebral (cognitive) and action (conative)’ (p.13). This suggests everything *but* the social. Proposition four and the substantiations of it add a social and cultural dimension to learning from experience, but one curiously linked to a psychotherapeutic element in ‘moving beyond the mental bonds’: ‘Critical reflection is required to examine the influences of our values and culture...The making problematic of the familiar is an important strategy in moving beyond the mental bonds which constrain us’ (p.14). Proposition five is substantiated by psychotherapeutic notions in ‘engaging fully the affective elements [of learning] can lead to

anxiety, pain and discomfort' (Postle in Boud *et al.* 1993: 15) and in 'We need, as learners, appropriate support, trust and challenge from others' (p.15).

The Boud *et al.* text is thoroughly generic. There is something for everyone in the propositions: agency, holism, social context, emotionality. Likewise in the substantiations: individual constructivism, situated learning, anti-foundationalism, some criticality, social constructivism, psychological development, cultural specificity and potential emotional freedom. In their original context - a book about experience, experiential learning and learning - these ideas form part of a structured argument that contributes to thinking in the field (and an authoritative contribution, given the positioning and popularity of the authors). In my Subject Review I argued that these particular writers anchor their ideas about experiential learning in learning theory, phenomenology and social psychology so as to broaden traditional definitions of experiential learning and learning from experience. However, as RPL recontextualising agents, we recontextualised the material for our own purposes. But what purposes and why?

In the same way as with the ETDP Quality Framework, Boud *et al.* valorise learning from experience (prior experiential knowledge in our case). They also elaborate and extend it – and begin to theorise it in a very 'light' way. I would claim that the propositions, with something for everyone, offered us a broad and inclusive canvas for RPL and its pedagogy, arguably broader than approaches with unexplicated theoretical bases *only* in Kolb's experiential learning cycle. Furthermore, based on the last chapter of analysis, I would argue that the Boud *et al.* substantiations brought RPL slightly closer to the pedagogic discourse of the department, particularly in the references to social context (in proposition four). However, there remained a gap between this text and departmental discourses. As previous analysis showed, the department operated within a framework of left liberalism underpinned by critical social

theory and philosophy. There is little if any critical social theory in the Boud *et al.* propositions. Again, two important and implicit perspectives or principles seem to have been coded into our use of this text: the importance of theorising learning from experience and the view that prior learning is in need of work before it can be recognised. I would hypothesise that these principles became part of the RPL pedagogic discourse.

A conference paper by Fotheringham *et al.*

The title, 'Adult Educators as Change Agents: Contributions to Social Transformation' suggests a radical stance which is not particularly evident in the content of the paper. What is clear, though, is that it is a quasi-academic paper, written by practitioners for practitioners:

This is the story of a literacy project that went wrong. The setting is an informal settlement...the story of perhaps too many development workers and educationists becoming involved in a literacy project: people who should have known better making a number of mistakes. It is also the story of people in the community where there are elements of selflessness and dedication on the one hand, and greed, jealousy and survival on the other. The real name of the community is, ironically enough for the purposes of our account, Happy Valley...in retrospect, many of our mistakes seemed very simple and obvious to ourselves...what is interesting is how we found ourselves in this situation, how we knew the theory of so-called progressive development work and believed that we could apply it but were somehow caught in a trap between theory and praxis. We have also needed to ask ourselves whether the mistakes were simply mistakes of implementation, of praxis, or whether what we call progressive literacy and development work was appropriate for the needs and context of the Happy Valley community (Fotheringham *et al.* 1995: 142).

A textual analysis of the above quotation is revealing in terms of the implicit and complex set of qualities and attributes that are coded into it. The opening line refers to 'the story of a literacy project that went wrong', suggesting that the writers are engaged in critical reflexive enquiry, prepared to analyse their mistakes and learn 'lessons'. The notion of 'story' suggests not wanting to generalize universal truths from their account. The authors are clearly grappling with the complexity of a particular social context and the role of power in educational interventions. The extract has a questioning, deconstructive and problematising style. The authors are prepared to be critical of progressive orthodoxies in literacy practices as indicated in references to the appropriateness or otherwise of 'so-called progressive development work'. In fact, the paper ends on a critical note regarding the power effects of discourses of 'empowerment' and 'transformation'. The writers claim that the experience of the literacy project undermined teachers' and community confidence and that 'transformation did not happen despite our good intentions' (p.150).

In its style and stance the paper was close to the departmental discourse, especially in expressing the need to deconstruct 'progressive' educational orthodoxies and their associated practices – to go beyond surface codings. I would argue that, in recontextualising this paper we were unconsciously signalling a wide, complex and quite subtle range of desirable (in our view) academic practices and standpoints which subsequently became part of the RPL pedagogic discourse and gaze.

An academic paper by Usher

This paper is about adult educators/lecturers in higher education that recognise adult educators/students' experience as a resource for productive learning. This involves students

learning to value their experience and to deploy active learning strategies (involving group discussion of diverse conceptions of 'learning'). It involves educators helping students to see the perspective-dependence of knowledge and supporting them in developing theories about their own learning as meta-theory (knowledge about knowledge).

Why did we recontextualise this paper as an RPL resource? Its positioning as the final text suggests that it represented the culmination of the 'progression' principle within RPL, with Fotheringham *et al.* as a sort of half-way house. It is a fully fledged academic text which turns attention away from educator practice towards theorising oneself as a learner. Yet it is still loosely concerned with 'experience'. The paper's job seemed to be to act as a bridge (a one-way bridge?) between RPL and the diploma. As forthcoming analysis will show, candidates recognised the paper's significance and authority as such.

In a more interpretive vein, what was the significance of the above recontextualising decisions? Each text carried messages, and modelled or brokered implicit and 'ideal type' candidate positions. The Quality Framework signalled the importance of knowledge over and above practice, and the significance of a particular socio-political value system. The Boud *et al.* text signalled the desirability of theorising prior learning in ways that went beyond Kolb. The Fotheringham *et al.* text was more complex, with its storied, contextually aware, deconstructive, problematising approach (perhaps closest to the departmental discourse). The Usher text embodied the authority of an academic text and the need to be able to engage with such, as well as the desirability of a particular theoretical understanding of learning from experience and the ability to apply that to oneself as a learner.

Bernstein's concepts lead me to claim that two recontextualising principles were at work during curriculum design. These became part of the RPL pedagogic discourse:

- Practitioner knowledge¹⁴⁰ was to be delimited and distanced – valued, but only up to a point.
- A range of academic practices and standpoints were important: it was these that would count.

The delivery of the RPL curriculum

The above curriculum resources were moulded into the particular and bounded time and space of the RPL pilot. There were two x two day workshops, together with private study and individual consultations, an expectation of 50-60 hours' study time in total. What follows is a picture of the overall process:

¹⁴⁰ This does not necessarily encompass *all* prior experiential learning, only practitioner prior experiential learning.

Orientation day →	Introduction activity	Activity 1: Why are we here?	Activity 2: Introducing RPL	Activity 3: Explaining the departmental teaching programmes and the RPL process	Activity 4: Group map of educator/ practitioner prior learning + Quality Framework
Consultations →	Debriefing from orientation day	Practical arrangements	Introducing activities for the first weekend		
First weekend →	Introduction activity: ‘review’ – mapping learning against criteria	Activity 1: How do we understand experience, knowledge and learning? – Lifeline activity + Boud <i>et al.</i> text	Activity 2: The Fotheringham <i>et al.</i> text	Peer group analysis of the Fotheringham <i>et al.</i> text	Introducing activities for second weekend
Second weekend →	Introduction	Activity 1: The Usher text – group critique of this	Presentation of guidelines for producing candidates’ second portfolio text	Peer group analysis of the Usher text	Other details about portfolio presentation, e.g. the motivation

Figure 5: The overall RPL process.

In Bernstein's terms, the texts were 'formatted for consumption'. Implicit in formatting are the cognitive, cultural and social relationships that characterise a curriculum-in-action. It is to these relationships that I now turn: to an analysis of 'the how' of the recontextualisation process – the pedagogy.

Orientation Day

As a result of the publicity exercise outlined in the previous chapter, an orientation day was held with potential RPL candidates on 14/11/97. It was planned as an information day after which individuals could decide about proceeding to the full RPL programme. The workshop attracted ten people, seven of whom eventually committed themselves to RPL. The overall aims of the day were expressed to the participants in the following terms: 'To give you information about RPL and what it involves in the department. It is also a chance for us all to get to know each other as a group prior to working together in January' (Letter to candidates, 13/11/97).

There was a clear personal touch and implied shared purpose in the use of 'us'. Elsewhere in the letter, participants were referred to as 'colleagues', a further equalising move. The detailed aims were (1) to explore candidates' motivations for wanting access to the diploma, (2) to inform candidates about RPL (generally, and in *this* context), (3) to inform candidates about departmental teaching programmes and existing pathways into and through them, and (4) to begin to get a sense of prior learning within the group through a 'revealing knowledges' activity.

Introduction activity

The day began in the competence style of adult education with introductions and a ‘sharing’ of information about participants’ prior and current practice as educators. There was an opportunity for each candidate to ‘share’ one thing they had learnt about adult learners from their educator experience – that is, ‘one small piece of your prior learning’. There was a discussion as to whether their contributions related to ‘things formally taught’. The term ‘experiential learning’ was introduced and became the first item on a ‘vocabulary list’, to be added to during the RPL process.

In Bernstein’s terms, this activity is a classic competence model approach. The candidates were seen as active and creative subjects in the construction of shared meanings; ‘similar to’ relations were emphasised over differences; hierarchical relationships between teacher and learner were minimized by ‘sharing’. If there was pedagogy here, it was implicit and masked by *surface emphasis* on democratic participation, valuing of non- and informal learning, and a very informal, personal and facilitatory style. However, that there was a programme for the day indicates that the activity was strongly framed in terms of teacher control over the sequencing¹⁴¹ and timing. The ‘vocabulary list’ also suggests a more formal teaching role – the beginning of the teaching of a specialised language perhaps?

Activity 1: Why are we here?

This was the first main activity of the day: ‘Why we are here’. Participants engaged in a brainstorm around their interest in departmental courses and ‘How do you feel about being

¹⁴¹ What comes first, second, etc.

here?' The question implied an affective/therapeutic concern with the 'whole person'. The practice of brainstorm suggests that all contributions are of equal worth. There was a substantial amount of *seeming* learner control over the activity. Pedagogic input was extremely reargrounded but, as is the case with the competence pedagogic model, this does not necessarily imply an absence of shaping of what was said and what was not.

Activity 2: Introducing RPL

The second main activity was 'Introducing RPL'. It took the form of a short formal input on the history and scope of RPL internationally. It was acknowledged that RPL was 'a very simple idea but much more complicated than that in reality'. The input was followed by a list of claims made in the name of RPL. For example, it avoids adults having to relearn what they already know; it increases feelings of self-worth; it contributes to social justice in terms of fairness, access, equity. These claims were then problematised via a series of statements offered to participants, to which they could reply 'True' or 'False' - for example, 'RPL is about valuing learning from experience – true or false?' After some individual and pair work, the statements were discussed in the whole group. The facilitators' perspectives on all of the statements were 'Yes, but...' For example, in relation to the question about valuing learning from experience, the facilitators' response was, 'Yes, the idea behind RPL is to value all of that, *but* not all of it may be relevant to the course in question so it is also a case of sifting through learning from experience to see which parts of it can be recognised in relation to a particular course of study' (Notes for orientation day: 2). Another statement was, 'Learning is learning – no matter where it occurs, e.g. whether from work experience or from formal learning'. Again the facilitators' view was 'Yes, *but*...:

Yes – but it isn't always the same kind of learning. As we know, knowledge is organised in particular ways in educational institutions – in higher education traditionally in terms of academic disciplines. It is also true that formal knowledge is not a static thing – it is always subject to change. There is evidence that traditional forms of knowledge are under particular pressure around the world at the moment...RPL has to act as a bridge between experiential learning and formal learning. To get them to speak to each other...RPL is about movement both ways – about moving prior learning closer to formal learning and making formal learning more responsive to prior learning (Notes for orientation day: 3).

The above quotation embodies an understanding of RPL as building bridges both ways. A final example was 'RPL is only about prior learning, not about new learning – true or false?' Here, the facilitators took the view that it was about both:

...if...RPL is about building bridges between experiential learning and more formal learning, then that building of bridges may well involve some new learning...One of the key aspects of RPL in HE is to uncover the abilities people have and to begin a process of new learning where required, to 'translate' those abilities into a form that can operate within HE (in this case the diploma) (Notes for orientation day: 3).

Here there is academic drift towards the new learning type of RPL which is invariably more of a one-way bridge not a two-way one. The quotation seems to confirm an inductive, teaching role for RPL (as prefigured in the PWG meetings and in our selection of texts with 'progression' as a key principle). Taken as a whole, the above statements and the responses to them suggest recognition of different forms of knowledge but with a need to orientate them to institutional demands.

With regard to Bernstein's competence and performance pedagogic models, there were more explicit elements in this activity than in previous ones. The teacher became more visible, and the activity more strongly framed, when specific views were presented as 'yes, buts'. The 'yes, buts' were scripted *before* the meeting which further underscored teacher control. Sequencing and timing remained strongly framed. It is interesting to note the beginnings of a deficit understanding of prior learning. Our tone was a problematising, probing one, the beginnings of theorising perhaps? It is worth recalling the first of the two RPL recontextualising principles, that practitioner knowledge was to be delimited and distanced, valued, but only up to a point. This started happening during the orientation day.

Activity 3: Explaining the departmental teaching programmes and the RPL process

The third activity was to explain departmental teaching programmes and the RPL pilot to participants. This included a view of the certificate as 'an initial professionalizing course concerned to develop practitioners' skills', and the diploma as a 'further professionalizing course' (Notes for orientation workshop: 4). Characteristics of learners accessing the diploma via the certificate and the M+3 routes were also outlined, drawing from discussions in the departmental workshop:

Learners entering via the two entry routes have different characteristics. M+3s having formal academic skills and maybe some experience as an educator/trainer – but not necessarily...Certificate students having experience first...and academic skills second (Notes for orientation day: 5).

The RPL access route was located within these access arrangements, with characteristics of learners enshrined in assessment criteria, rather than in previous formal qualifications or

socialisation into departmental mores via (very) successful completion of the certificate. Our preliminary work on criteria (at the time still incomplete) was outlined. At this time, they were conceptualised as lying at the crossover of three 'roles' (depicted as three intersecting circles): the roles of lifelong learner, adult education practitioner, and potential HE learner. RPL was outlined to participants by way of two facilitator 'commitments'. The first to 'the prior learning part' of the above three roles, to 'providing opportunities for revealing and better understanding prior learning – the abilities developed in whatever life or work situation' (Notes for orientation day: 5). It was a slightly circumspect commitment to prior learning, given the criteria. What does 'better understanding' mean? Distancing? Theorising?

The second commitment was to 'the new learning part' of the roles, carrying the assumption that working with texts would involve new learning 'at an appropriate level'. It was expressed as a commitment to 'providing very supported or 'scaffolded' opportunities for beginning to build the bridge between prior learning and the [diploma] – to see how abilities transfer to the new situation – the requirements of the [diploma]' (Notes for orientation day: 5). Here is the explicit shift from the two-way-bridge type of RPL to the one-way-bridge and new learning type. Differentiating between prior and new learning signalled the classification of knowledge and therefore insulations and degrees of (im)permeability. The implicit suggestion was that movement over the boundary was not automatic. The Vygotskian scaffolding was designed to point the way, although the quote suggests that it was primarily candidates' responsibility to negotiate the scaffolded bridge.

According to the planning notes, discussion then moved to practical matters of assessment. The facilitators put forward a disclaimer, that there was 'no guarantee of access to the diploma. That all depends on assessment'. Yet we also emphasised that RPL was 'NOT about

passing or failing’, but ‘about finding the most appropriate entry point – that gives you the best chance of succeeding in the longer term’. Participants were offered a range of possible outcomes. For example, they could decide at this stage to opt for the certificate rather than RPL. The stress seemed to be on all parties being ‘responsible and honest about what is possible and what is not’ (Notes for orientation day: 6). Robert, it seems, was correct in his view that responsibility for ‘failure’ had passed to learners.

The above presentation is significant for what it was *not*, as well as what it was. It involved, not the competence language of empowerment, but a circumspect language of empowerment which held out promise *and* constraint. It legitimised and strengthened this through appeals to ‘virtues’ such as responsibility and honesty. Performance pedagogy and institutional requirements came to the fore: power shifted to the university. The activity was strongly framed - didactic and visible, with explicit teacher control over selection of topic and sequencing, and institutional control over assessment/evaluative rules.

Activity 4: Creating a group ‘map’ of ETD practitioner prior learning

The final activity of the day adopted a ‘celebratory’ and ‘advocatory’ stance towards prior learning. Participants created a group ‘map’ of ETD expertise involved in ‘planning a learning intervention’ – something which it was assumed they had all experienced. According to the notes (p.6-7), the activity was designed to ‘identify strengths’, to ‘begin to see the group profile’ and to develop a ‘collective resource that can be drawn on’ during the RPL process. The creation of the map involved a brainstorm via two questions, ‘What do you have to *do*?’ and ‘What *knowledge* do you draw on when you do these things?’ The activity referred to the ETDP Quality Framework. In the context of the RPL process, the ‘doing’ question was related

to the 'design' ability discussed earlier and to the role of 'adult education practitioner'. The 'knowledge' question was related to the 'text' ability and to the role of 'potential HE learner'. This created a dichotomy between practice and knowledge/the academy which was not there in the Quality Framework. An overly optimistic (and neat) organising gesture on the part of the RPL facilitators perhaps? An attempt to tie the activity to 'roles' and 'abilities'?

This activity reinserted competence pedagogy. It reverted to an apparent valuing of all contributions and all knowledge. Learners were again active in constructing meanings. The emphasis was seemingly on valuing competence that already existed with no overt differentiation or grading. There was a semblance of democracy and equality with everyone involved in validating prior skills and knowledge, without reference to formal bodies of knowledge or knowledge structures. However, the use of the Quality Framework foregrounded knowledge and therefore signalled the inadequacy of prior learning that was not knowledge-based. Performance lurked behind competence.

There are not many participant data pertaining specifically to the delivery side of the orientation day. What there are suggests that the participants would have been very demoralised by performance pedagogy alone. Even though competence pedagogy is ambiguous about power and control, the friendliness and valuing were important in easing participants over the RPL boundary.

For Deborah, the day was 'gentle', 'encouraging' and supportive: 'It was so gentle – the introduction...The orientation was exciting – it was encouraging...What I recall is applying, but there was support even at that point'. For Freda, the day was friendly and 'welcoming' and very necessarily so: 'The initial contact...set a tone – the welcoming or the not

welcoming...that for me was key. It could have chased me instantaneously... because I was perhaps nervous'. Four other participants shared Freda's sense of nervousness and hesitation. Marie felt that she had been informally selected even before the orientation day¹⁴², in her interview with me, but she remained nervous:

I remember you saying 'you're just the kind of person we want on this programme'. And I held on to that. So when I came into the workshop I had a sense that I had already perhaps passed some level of test. That I wouldn't be invited to the workshop if I was horribly off the mark. So I had a great sense that there was a good chance that I could make it. But that I knew in my head...

Oscar and Vusi referred to being afraid: 'its just not knowing what it was going to be like. There was always this fear you know' (Oscar); 'I was sort of being afraid. I had this inferior...that I did not do well at school' (Vusi). Michael expressed his nervousness as a worry about whether or not he was up to it: 'I think that one of the things that was worrying me right from day one was whether I would be able to perform the tasks that were required – do the work – could I actually do it?'

In a more interpretive vein, there was a continual alternation of competence-dominance and performance-dominance between and sometimes within activities. The latter came to the fore in activities such as critiquing the concept of RPL, formulating the 'vocabulary list', the 'commitments', explaining the RPL process and the envisaged assessment procedures. The complex interplay of the two models is clearly visible in the final activity 'celebrating' prior learning – where the discussion concerned only a certain subset of prior learning framed by national ETDP standards, with knowledge brought to the fore. I would argue that performance

¹⁴² Performance pedagogy at work even at that stage?

pedagogy dominated the day, and that where competence was deployed, performance lurked closely behind.

The amount of prior learning that entered the pedagogic frame was circumscribed, and indeed shifted/receded at various times during the day, while the importance of particular academic abilities percolated through the message systems of the day's activities. Thus, for example, weak framing/learner control was signalled by informal discussion, but this was embedded in strong framing/teacher control, in that the outcomes of 'informal' discussions were pre-scripted by the facilitators. Sequencing remained strongly framed throughout. Pacing (the expected rate of acquisition) was weakly framed. Candidates were, it seems, in control of the rate of their own learning (or failure).

Consultations with individual candidates

At the end of the orientation day participants were invited to set up individual consultations with either Frances or myself, the aims of which were expressed as follows:

- debriefing from the orientation day;
- clarifying the January [i.e. the RPL] process;
- admin – applications etc;
- preparing for the January process (Notes for consultations: 1).

A competence-pastoral approach was foregrounded. We wanted to know which parts of the orientation day went well for which participants, and which 'not so well'; whether there were

‘any surprises’, and whether there were any ‘new learnings’ (emphasizing this particular type of RPL).

The idea of a ‘learning journal’ was introduced. This was seen as a process of ‘data gathering’ for ‘reflections on prior learning and new learning and learning process’¹⁴³. Time would be structured into RPL for journal writing. This would be a private document which might be a source of information for writing the ‘motivation’¹⁴⁴ to be submitted with other documents for assessment (Notes for consultations: 1).

The structure of the RPL pilot was explained to each candidate, and deadlines for submission of ‘work’ were presented. Each candidate was to produce a portfolio of two ‘texts’, a motivation and any other ‘evidence’ they wished to include. This was the first mention of ‘texts’. Candidate texts were to mirror the Fotheringham *et al.* and Usher texts. The first was to involve ‘describing and analysing their practice/practitioner roles (design)’¹⁴⁵, and the second was to be ‘about moving to the role of HE learner – so theorising adult learning’ and themselves as adult learners (textual abilities)¹⁴⁶. The notion of ‘moving to’ confirms the principle of progression and new learning discussed earlier.

Practical arrangements for assessment were outlined, with dates when candidates would be notified of outcomes. It was stressed (again) that ‘there are no guarantees and that they have to agree to accept the departmental decision’ (Notes for consultations: 1-2). To conclude the consultation, three activities for the first weekend RPL session were set. The first was to undertake a lifeline activity; the second was to capture initial personal reflections to in the

¹⁴³ Researching (disciplining) the self as a learner?

¹⁴⁴ Motivation, used in this way, is particularly South African, referring to making the case for something.

¹⁴⁵ Hereafter called ‘the practitioner text’ or ‘the Fotheringham text’.

¹⁴⁶ Hereafter called ‘the Usher text’.

learning journal; the third, was to read the Fotheringham *et al.* paper and to begin to think about their own educator experience in relation to it.

The consultations were a combination of competence and performance models. An informal therapeutic competence voice was deployed in the idea of ‘negotiating’ with individuals about how they wished to proceed. The learning journal formally introduced the notion of personal/individual reflection as a methodology within RPL. It also suggested a private, internal, introspective world – rather like a diary. Though not necessarily a public document, it positions the private world precariously close to the public one, when formal assessment looms.

The distributive rules, strong framings and performance pedagogies of the university were foregrounded in the references to hierarchical authority relations, university rules, the requirement for academic skills such as ‘analysis’ and ‘theorising’, and the strict guidelines on portfolio content. Consultations prefigured a packaging (or recontextualising) of prior learning in forms palatable to the university and commensurate with the texts and the assessment criteria. New (formal) learning was increasingly foregrounded – referred to on two occasions during the consultations. To the analytical eye, it is now exceedingly clear what type of RPL this was¹⁴⁷.

¹⁴⁷ It was not to me at the time.

The first weekend

RPL began with seven candidates. Petra had been employed for seven years in a university-hosted NGO that worked with trade unions in the area of occupational health. Deborah had been working with a rural development NGO for nine years. Marie had been involved in HRD work in the private sector for seven years and had experience as a Lifeline¹⁴⁸ counsellor and trainer. Oscar worked as an ABET curriculum designer and manager in an NGO. He had fifteen years' experience of trade union work. Vusi had five years of community-based adult educator experience in drama. Michael had been running a film and TV school for fifteen years as manager, curriculum designer and teacher. Freda had many years' experience in HRD in the private sector, ran her own business consultancy and had lecturing experience in private tertiary colleges. In 'race' terms, two male candidates were black (one coloured and one African); the four women were white; and there was one white male.

Introductory activity

The first weekend began with a review of discussions during the orientation day. A completed set of criteria was 'shared' with candidates. Each activity in RPL was to be followed by an opportunity to map its process and outcomes against the criteria and to record observations in learning journals. The aim was for candidates to build up a cumulative profile of their learning and knowledge in relation to the criteria. They were, it seems, being asked to recontextualise their prior experiential knowledge as criteria. Furthermore, there had been a shift from criteria as sitting at *the intersection of* the three roles (as discussed during the orientation day), to the criteria in front of two of the roles, and to those, in turn, in front of the lifelong learner role.

¹⁴⁸ South African equivalent of the Samaritans.

This suggests that lifelong learning and broader, more divergent prior experiential knowledge were continually reargounded. Academic potential and *particular* aspects of prior experiential learning – in other words, academic drift - were foregrounded. The type of RPL tightens its grip, as does the second recontextualising principle.

The review continued with a 'discussion' of portfolios and texts and of how 'the texts taken as a whole will be assessed against the criteria' (Notes for first weekend: 2). The department's request for a formal agreement signed by each candidate was also addressed. The agreement (discussed in the Foucauldian analysis) absolved the department of ongoing responsibility to candidates and, at the same time, tied the candidates into the evaluative rules of the department: 'Assessment of portfolios will be undertaken by a team of departmental academic staff who will make the final judgments about student admissions' (Agreement between the department and RPL candidates). Finally, a programme for the four days was presented. Explicit attention was drawn to teaching and learning strategies, with a Vygotskian 'social' element emphasised through collaborative group work to be undertaken in peer reference groups, '...time working as a whole group, time individually and...small group and individual work will be organised within peer reference groups made up of people in similar practitioner contexts – for first level support. Learning is a social process...' (Notes for first weekend: 2).

The activity of mapping learning against criteria is suggestive of active learners orientating themselves and their learning to future, external goals – a key characteristic of performance pedagogy. Following Bernstein, I would argue that this sort of profiling represents an incorporation of discourses and practices from the ORF into the PRF. However, the RPL assessment criteria were not the performative outcomes of his generic performance mode. They were an attempt to externalize previously undisclosed formal academic criteria staying

as close as possible to the diploma curriculum rather than moving to practice-based outcomes. The criteria therefore remained within the ambit of the PRF¹⁴⁹. Yet the process of mapping oneself against them is reminiscent of the generic performance pedagogic mode and associated notions of trainability and market instrumentality.

Candidate interview data does not make reference to this continuous mapping. Analysis has already shown ways in which the criteria exerted a backwash effect on curriculum design. Here they make an explicit entry into pedagogy and the curriculum-in-action. I would argue that the activity of continually reworking a particular specification of ‘competencies’ helps to firm up the RPL evaluative rules. It was quite a disciplining activity.

Activity 1: How do we understand experience, knowledge and learning?

Documentary evidence suggests that, having got the formalities out of the way, the session reverted to the alternating competence mode. The first activity was, ‘How do we understand “experience”, “knowledge” and “learning”?’ It juxtaposed the ‘lifeline activity’ (given to the candidates during the consultations as preparatory work) with the Boud *et al.* text on learning from experience.

The lifeline activity took as its starting-point ‘our role as lifelong learners’ (i.e. the recently reargrounded ‘role’): ‘The aim of this activity is to encourage each person to reflect on important experiences and events in their lives (lifeline activity)’. Between individual consultations and this session, candidates had been asked to draw a line representing their life

¹⁴⁹ The association of criteria with the ORF was probably one reason for the resistances in the departmental workshop.

– straight, wavy, curved, spiral, etc - and to use colours, symbols, shapes or drawings to signify events, decisions, influences, feelings, experiences, people, places. and so on.

Most candidates recalled the lifeline activity as an extremely positive experience particularly with regard to *acknowledgement*. For Oscar, the reflective part was central to acknowledging his identity and the worth of his informal learning connected to political struggle (a populist reading of competence?):

...reflecting on my history because there was obviously the question about ‘who are you? what makes you? what is your history about? what have you learnt?’...The RPL process – what I liked about it most was that it allowed me an opportunity to reflect and...to think about that a bit more – which perhaps I would never have done had that opportunity not come up – that was great. And then being able to see how that helped me to gain access...

Freda welcomed the ‘time for reflection’ during this activity. For Deborah the lifeline activity was affirming: ‘So, things like the lifeline history are really affirming. Just doing it was really helpful’. Vusi noted a positive outcome in the way it helped him to remember his prior learning: ‘So each and every one of us was asked to reflect on his learning or social experience, if I may call it that...It refreshed my memory and I was quite amazed to learn that I can still remember the things that had happened in my past...’

One cannot discount the positive impact of reflection on life history, especially for those whose sense of worth has been diminished. This restitutive effect seems to have been enhanced by being seen and heard by representatives of a formal institution. One candidate, Deborah, reported how she used the lifeline activity in her development work with marginalised communities:

I used the lifeline activity as an icebreaker and it stays and it goes on being one of the most valuable processes – of substance to people who live [in rural communities]. That's the thing they want. They're not so interested in the bloody analyses of their problems, it's that, it's that acknowledgement of them. It's very powerful.

Analysis suggests that it was the most competence-orientated activity of the whole RPL process. On the surface, learners were seen as active and creative subjects in the construction of meanings; there was an emphasis on already existing competence; no hierarchical or deficit judgments were made about the value (or otherwise) of life histories; learners had control over what they disclosed. There is an inherent ambiguity in competence pedagogy. It may be 'fake' in that it disguises institutional power and control, but candidates needed the valuing.

Pedagogic presence became more visible in the second half of the activity, when the lifelines were juxtaposed with the Boud *et al.* 'propositions'. The planning notes for this half of the activity introduced exactly those elements of critical social theory that were identified as absent from the text, as well as introducing a slightly postmodern tone in 'many ways of knowing', with particular relations of power attributed to some ways of knowing:

Conclude with key points from earlier notes: social construction of experience and knowledge; critical role of background, values etc; many ways of knowing – some more highly valued than others...not always easy to transfer learning from one experiential context to another (Notes for first weekend: 2-3).

This suggests that we extended the theoretical base of the Boud *et al.* text so as to bring it closer to the departmental-diploma discourse. In introducing the text, we inserted a

performance model of pedagogy. The activity became more strongly framed, and hitherto invisible pedagogy began to emerge. I have argued that the Boud *et al.* text was used to valorise prior learning *and* to signal that it was not enough alone. Freda was the only candidate who spoke specifically about this. She seems to have picked up our implicit message and (unsurprisingly) was ambivalent towards it. On the one hand, she took comfort from the way the text acknowledged her prior learning. On the other hand, she had her doubts, indicated by ‘perhaps’ and ‘maybe’:

The emphasis within that text on experiential learning was comforting because you couldn’t question the fact that we did perhaps have [that] and that was valued in this particular academic text. In a way it was a reassurance – that maybe we did have something to offer.

Activity 2: The Fotheringham *et al.* text

The second activity of the first weekend focused on the Fotheringham *et al.* text. Candidates engaged with it at three levels: first, as a physical text – in terms of layout, constructions of arguments, organisation and so on; secondly, with regard to its content; and thirdly, in terms of how well it would satisfy the RPL assessment criteria as a (notional) portfolio text.

We divided the paper into two sections – ‘Introduction and the description of practice’ and ‘identifying and understanding/analysing issues’. The above three levels were discussed in relation to each section. This was done in peer reference groupings. Candidates were invited to first jot their personal reflections in their learning journals. In ‘identifying and understanding/analysing issues’, candidates were referred to the ETDP Quality Framework particularly to the way in which ETD roles are based in expertise, and expertise grounded in knowledge, ‘which

provide the grounds for the choices, decisions and judgments re: teaching and learning' (Notes for first weekend: 4). Questions were posed such as, 'Does the ETD model help to illuminate why things went wrong at Happy Valley?'

Overnight, candidates chose one aspect, event or experience of their practitioner prior learning to treat in a Fotheringham-type way. During the second day of the first weekend one hour was allocated to each candidate for a presentation and substantial group discussion of their selected topic.

Interview data suggest that candidates saw the Fotheringham *et al.* text and activities as belonging to 'progression' within RPL. Michael said, 'Oh, there was definitely progression'. Oscar noted, 'There was a shift during that period'. For Marie, the Fotheringham *et al.* text was seen as close to practice and therefore a reassuring *basis* for new (academic) learning. This view resonated with our idea that the paper was a sort of half-way house between the roles of practitioner and HE learner:

I think the way it was set up, firstly, to look at ourselves as practitioners. I liked that in retrospect because it was not breaking apart our comfort zone before we were ready to do that. There was a process. The self as practitioner was really a process of empowering our own expectations and allowing us to start developing writing in particular ways, in content that I felt familiar with, content about work, and confident about working with (Marie).

There was resistance to the text from others. Freda opposed our strong framing of the activity and the silencing effect it had on her own prior (corporate) learning. She grasped very starkly the way the paper valorised some prior experiential knowledge (community-based) and excluded others:

Considering the target audience and the purpose of this submission, the recognition of my prior learning, my initial reaction was to place on record personal achievements, successes and learnings, which are many and varied, over a long period of time, in relation to a wide spectrum of business and education practice. The activity allocated, however, was to identify an own practitioner experience to be analysed and based on the Fotheringham paper (Portfolio text 1: 1).

Deborah had ideological problems with the assumed authority of the authors. In populist-radical terms (of people's education and the UDF?), she saw Fotheringham *et al.* as stealing from the participants in the literacy project, as 'taking ownership of a knowledge that actually belongs to someone else and is in other peoples' experience... It's that drawing power and sustenance and not giving it back'.

In an interpretive vein, performance pedagogy came to the fore in the Fotheringham activity, as the production of individualised texts for evaluation, emphasis towards the future, use of the text as an external template/goal to emulate, etc. This shift to performance was what some candidates saw as progression. The Fotheringham activities were strongly framed in terms of sequencing and the rules of communication, in that explicit and visible expectations were spelled out - for example, about how to engage with the text and how to relate prior learning to it, with regard to both content *and* style.

I have already claimed that part of the rationale for the recontextualisation of the paper was to signal desirable (in our view) academic practices and standpoints, for example, the adoption of a storied quality in talking about practice; critical reflective enquiry; the foregrounding of social context; and attention to power relations, especially those hidden in orthodoxies such as

‘progressive’ practice. The requirement that candidates model their first text on Fotheringham *et al.* strengthens that claim. We were inviting candidates to do what the Fotheringham *et al.* text did and, in so doing, reflect our recontextualising gaze back to us. We were seeking candidates capable of theorising their practice in a Fotheringham-type way. Practice was to recede as theorisation, contextualisation and critique were foregrounded. In many ways the paper did the teaching, allowing us to ‘facilitate’ in competence mode. The competence model therefore applied through the personal style of the support given to candidates by each other (and by us as facilitators).

Between the two weekend sessions, candidates prepared a draft of their practitioner text. They also updated their learning journals and read the paper that would be the subject of the forthcoming session – ‘Adult Students and their Experience: Developing a Resource for Learning’ - and noted aspects of the text that interested and/or confused them.

The second weekend

We indicated that we were moving (‘progressing’) ‘closer to diploma mode’¹⁵⁰ and that the Usher text represented that shift, ‘the move from a text by practitioners for practitioners to a text by an academic for academics or HE students’ (Notes for second weekend: 1).

Issues that candidates found interesting and/or confusing on first reading were discussed by the whole group. They raised some thoroughly sociological and political matters, such as Usher’s lack of attention to context:

¹⁵⁰ More academic drift.

Usher has a 'sneaky' way of arguing – it's hard to disagree with him; linking learning to experience – what if experience is missing?; his 'good' versus 'bad' learning experiences need to be linked to broader socio-political context and to social norms and codes (From flip chart used in session).

Matters seen as 'confusing' included Usher's lack of definition of his key concepts: 'Usher's understanding of an 'adult' and the homogeneity he assumes; his lack of definition of how he is seeing 'learning'; his dichotomies – subjective versus objective – deep versus surface etc.' (From flip chart used in session). Candidates' critiques were incisive, perceptive, complex and theoretical. What this indicates about the nature of (at least some of) the candidates' prior experiential knowledge is discussed in part three of this chapter.

The text was dealt with in a way that mirrored the chronology of Usher's arguments. As with Fotheringham *et al.*, it was divided into sections. In peer groupings, candidates summarised the main arguments in some form of visual representation (a mind map, for example). Their discussions took most of the first day and were interspersed with whole group plenary sessions. Towards the end of the day, the production of the second portfolio text was discussed. The task was called 'Analysing and Evaluating Self as a Learner' - a detailed task, beginning with *our* summary of Usher's arguments. Candidates were asked to 'use Usher's arguments as a tool to analyse and evaluate yourself as a learner', and to do this in three steps:

- Provide a summary of Usher's main points.
- Say whether you agree or disagree with those points by drawing on concrete examples from your own experience as a learner.

- Reflect on what the above reveals about your own learning, i.e. can you begin to develop a theory of yourself as a learner? (Task for text 2).

An attempt was made to scaffold (in our case frame more strongly) the task by offering guidelines – rules of communication (in Bernsteinian terms):

- You do *not* have to produce an academic paper like Usher's!
- You *will* need to produce a coherent text that introduces, develops and concludes, with linkages between points and sections;
- *Do* use your learning journal and any other resources and activities used during the RPL process to substantiate your points;
- ... you *are* beginning the process of writing as an adult education student to a lecturer on the diploma course. So, try and write the text in your own words – however, if you need/want to quote, use quotation marks and say who you are quoting (Task for text 2).

During the morning of the second day candidates worked individually on their texts, but within peer groups for immediate (competence-style) support. The first part of the final afternoon session was set aside for whole group discussion on the production of texts.

The Usher paper and related activities were the subject of much discussion in the candidate interview data¹⁵¹. Evidence suggests that Usher became a 'folk hero' of the recontextualisation process. Interview data recall an emotional time for the candidates - 'very scary', 'unnerving', 'I felt hugely out of my depth', 'different from everything else you were doing' (Oscar); 'one of the most difficult papers that I've ever read' (Michael); 'it was tough' (Vusi); 'oh my God this is hard', 'I felt very insecure' (Marie). Marie sums up the emotional tone of the group well

¹⁵¹ And subsequently. Those candidates accessing the diploma were referred to as 'usherettes'!

in the following: ‘on that day when we got given Usher’s text. Everyone’s personal stability was – it just *wasn’t*! It was a key moment in many ways’. An exception was Deborah, who found the paper ‘very nice – I liked it a lot’. Part three of this chapter will account for the ways different individuals reacted to the paper. What is clear is its high psychological impact.

It was experienced as *symbolic*. As mentioned, the paper was introduced as being ‘closer to diploma mode’ and as an academic text rather than a practitioner text. I would argue that this, together with the fact that it was a published paper, and that it occupied the final part of the RPL programme and had substantial time devoted to it, accounted for its symbolic authority.

It symbolised the *culmination of the progression principle* within RPL. Marie saw it as a ‘crunch moment’ and as the ‘step’ which other activities had paved the way for: ‘And then the next big step was, “here’s an academic text”. So, the self as practitioner was a preparation’. It symbolised *assessment*. For Oscar, it was a ‘wake up call’ for the future, and about ‘measuring’ – ‘it was a wake up call, that this is what going to happen later, and also being able to say to myself, ask myself, “are you up to this? Are you prepared to go and do this?”...it was measuring’.

The paper was also seen as symbolising the *power of the ‘system’, the power of the university*. Marie saw it as giving ‘a strong sense of what was required in the system’. And so did Oscar:

I definitely think the text itself – if anything, *that* was from the university. If you were told by the university to use one thing as a measurement it was that: ‘They should have some sense of what they need to do with *this*’.

It was also seen as symbolising the *academic requirements of diploma level study*: ‘I think you gave us so that we can learn and expect what is to be in class’ (Vusi). For Oscar, it was ‘a benchmark...in terms of what was going to be required and what kind of inputs I was going to have to make’. Marie (first interview) was more explicit about specific academic requirements:

I thought that obviously we are getting this text because this is the kind of stuff we are going to engage with on the diploma. So there were a lot of things that went into this - how to engage with this kind of text, the kind of language that was being used, the level of English or writing¹⁵².

The peer group reading of the Usher paper was seen as a powerful learning process, especially for the members of one of the peer groupings who had an almost mystical experience when they realised how powerfully it resonated with their experiences as learners within RPL. Petra (Portfolio, text 2: 3) saw herself as having been ‘taken through the steps described by Usher’. Marie described something ‘dawning’ on her: ‘And then it dawned on me that what he was talking about was what we were actually experiencing and that helped me understand’. Michael stressed ‘realisation’ and a very powerful ‘aha’ moment. In his portfolio (Text 2: 4), he says: ‘I was almost overwhelmed and I am still not really able to express in words how I felt afterwards’. In his second interview the moment remained poignant, as indicated by his recall of the detail of his immediate surroundings when it happened:

And then the second thing is that one suddenly realises that it’s happening to you. So, what is being described in the text is actually happening to the learner. That realisation came through...And...the three of us were in a team – and the realisation hit us almost at the same

¹⁵² In her later interview she expressed the requirements in identity terms (‘it’s about ways of being and ways of seeing’). This suggests that over time she came to see change at the level of identity.

time. And it was in that big room and it was a Saturday afternoon and it suddenly – that kind of existential feeling – you’ve suddenly got it and you say ‘OK, that’s what it’s really about’.

What do Bernstein’s theories reveal about the use of Usher? The paper signified the summation of academic drift. It was taken as a ‘marker’ of the recognition and realisation rules. A final set of messages (recontextualisation via perspective) were coded into it. These were about form as well as content. On the form side, we wanted candidates who could engage with academic texts such as Usher’s, who could understand (recognise) and work with (realise) academic theory. On the *content* side, we wanted candidates who could recognise themselves within (adult) learning theory and explain/theorise their own position as learners in such terms. The rules of communication were made explicit in the strongly framed guidance for the task, and the lists of ‘dos’ and ‘don’ts’. It was clear to everyone at this point that it was the evaluative rules of the university that mattered. Usher’s paper was seen as embodying the RPL pedagogic discourse.

The final part of the last afternoon was formal – reminding candidates about deadlines and introducing a framework for organizing their portfolios. Ideas for the personal ‘motivation’ text were discussed. It was suggested they:

- introduce self and context;
 - give a sense of why they want to do the diploma;
 - offer some reflections on the RPL process e.g. the relationship between prior and new learning;
 - make some comments about themselves in relation to the RPL assessment criteria;
 - make reference to any other ‘evidence’ they wish to submit in support of their application
- (Guidelines for motivation).

The portfolio production process was very strongly framed, as in, ‘portfolios will be submitted to the RPL staff by not later than 9.00 am on 26 January 1998’.

General views about the delivery of the RPL curriculum

This section of analysis adds plausibility and coherence to the analysis so far by taking account of the substantial amount of interview data where candidates spoke about RPL pedagogy in *general* terms rather than in relation to specific activities (as analysed above). It follows Bernstein’s emphasis on competence, performance, invisible and visible pedagogies *from the learners’ perspectives* because he perceives there to be often be a gap between transmission and acquisition – a gap in which ‘ideology’ can operate. What follows is a theme analysis of candidate data and the smaller amount of data from the co-facilitator and academics in the department¹⁵³.

What sort of competence pedagogy?

There are data elaborating on the nature and perceptions of competence pedagogy. First, there are generalised references to *teacher support to individuals*. Marie noted the continuous nature of the support: ‘And once again the support was there. It wasn’t – “here, go and work on your own at home and bring a portfolio”’. Oscar coded support as ‘help’ in, ‘You were the people who were helping us’. Roy, the sponsor of the RPL project, also commented on the quality of the support:

¹⁵³ Who were at a distance from the actual RPL process.

There's also clearly a very high commitment on the part of both yourself and Frances to provide an incredible amount of support. I mean, if you asked for support, you got it. And there wasn't a limit to what you could get. Well, maybe there was but...

Secondly, are references to *affirmation of candidates*. Deborah was most forthcoming about this. For her, affirmation was about being 'acknowledged', 'valued' and 'taken seriously' by 'somebody else'. Oscar and Vusi highlighted the importance of being seen and heard as individuals, in contrast I think to their experiences of formal education under apartheid: 'And it helped to also realise that you were looking at us as individuals, at who we were and what our experiences were' (Oscar); 'You were prepared to understand and listen to what I was saying' (Vusi). There is thus a very strong strand in the above data of 'being seen' and 'being heard' by others, especially by representatives of a formal institution.

Roy and Frances also noted recognition of individual worth as an affirming part of the RPL pedagogy. For Roy it was 'a confidence building process – suddenly you say "hey, somebody's actually saying that I'm OK about engaging". So you're recognizing their worth – "the way I work, the way I think, counts"'. From the close perspective of co-facilitator, Frances observed, 'I think they felt affirmed – personally and as learners'.

Thirdly, and linked to affirmation there are data relating to facilitators' (humanistic) *belief in individuals' ability to succeed*. Oscar said there was 'a belief that RPL people could make it'. For Petra, it was about a focus on swimming not sinking, on success, which she found motivating, 'a process that allowed you to swim. It never felt threatening like you wanted to give up' (First interview).

These three themes are firmly at one with Bernstein's competence mode. The *progressive/therapeutic* mode, with a focus on intra-individual processes, comes through strongly in the second theme. The third theme is a particularly clear instantiation of the competence facilitator's commitment to maximizing learner potential by seeing learners as 'already competent, merely unactualised' (Muller 1996a: 13).

A fourth characteristic of the competence pedagogy is the *non-didactic, non-directive mode of transmission*. Freda saw it as two-way learning, suggesting a degree of reciprocity and equality: 'There was almost a willingness to learn from both sides'. Deborah saw the facilitators as not imposing their views and decisions, which provided her with a space for her own learning. In her portfolio (Text 2: 7), she referred to this as follows: '...skilled facilitation, which draws on the initiative of the group of learners in discussion, rather than imposing their decisions about the issues, provided me with a context which stimulated me to engage in authentic and active learning'. For Oscar, it was about us letting the debates be self-directing. Like Freda, he suggested that we adopted a non-expert, equal, position: 'The facilitators on the course allowed the debates to be self-directing on the part of the participants with minimum contribution by facilitators. Facilitators did not adopt the approach of experts' (Portfolio text 2: 6). Petra, however, was more circumspect and critical in her analysis. For her, the non-directive style involved the facilitators 'shaping the process without directing it' (Portfolio text 2: 4). Such a comment chimes with earlier analysis about control in competence pedagogy.

Fifthly, candidate data suggest an expectation that candidates *share and disclose*. For Vusi, this was coded as 'sort of explaining...Each and everyone was asked to sort of explain and there were some group discussions'. For Freda, disclosure was linked to trust and support

within the group, so that if necessary one could 'look stupid' and 'lay oneself bare'. For Petra, the group was a safe space. She said 'the group was very supportive' and, although she felt 'exposed sometimes' it was 'not scary actually'.

Marie and Deborah were more comfortable with disclosure than other candidates. Deborah described herself as 'wedded' to it. And for Marie, there wasn't enough of it. She wanted RPL to embrace a psychotherapeutic dimension alongside a sociological one, a process that would allow people to deal with their 'inner stuff'.

Rosy¹⁵⁴ raised a more general and analytical point about particular reflective and verbal styles of disclosure in adult education teaching programmes. For her, there was a 'conflation between learning from experience and being able to talk about learning from experience', whereas in other contexts, 'if you're doing something else in life, you can do it fantastically well without necessarily being able to reflect and articulate on how you do it and what you do – you do it intuitively'. Her main point was that this is exclusionary. She referred directly to RPL:

And I was aware of someone like Vusi and I can think of lots of people in the certificate class – would really be disadvantaged by that. Because their discourse is not that kind of individual, very self-reflective, psycho-analytical almost, therapeutic – it's a far more eclectic and organisational discourse. They find it really hard to talk about themselves and we count that as somehow a lot....

Bernstein's three modes of competence illuminate Rosy's thinking. Reflective disclosure can be seen as an attribute of the progressive-therapeutic mode. In an organisational style of

¹⁵⁴ Academic in the department with responsibility for the certificate programme.

reflection, the focus is on problem-solving and action not personal introspection. This would be Bernstein's populist or radical mode. She suggested that adult education and RPL find ways to 'establish learnings from experience without necessarily requiring people to be able to personally reflect on those learnings in a particular way'. For example, 'just talk to them and make deductions from that'.

The sixth and final competence theme links to disclosure. There were a number of emphatic references to RPL as a *humanistic nurturing comfort zone*. Petra referred directly to 'nurturing', 'caring' and 'safety': 'It felt like we were being encouraged and nurtured – really, you know... It felt like a nice and safe environment'. Petra also alluded (critically) to the ambiguous and power-laden boundary between nurturing and judging, suggesting that competence pedagogy makes judgement feel like nurturing (that is, masks power and control): 'So, what I suppose was nice, it wasn't just judging – I didn't feel that I was being judged but I felt that I had been nurtured to the point where I could go and do the course'. Deborah referred to nurturing, and added that some candidates adopted the same pedagogy in relation to each other when they moved on to the diploma course: 'You were already creating a nurturing space for the likes of us and we needed it and we could use it – for those of us who went on – obviously we did – we used it'. In a similar vein, these two candidates saw the RPL facilitators as comfortable – 'relaxing', 'easy' and 'non-threatening'.

There is a point at which nurturing shaded into therapy for some candidates. As mentioned, Marie wanted more disclosure of 'inner stuff'. Freda referred to RPL as 'better than therapy', adding: 'In one of my essays or once somebody said – "this was better than a therapy session" and I could relate to that because there was reflection and time for self which we very rarely

stop to do if you're not forced to do'. For Deborah, 'it was like "holding" – a "container"'. For Petra, RPL helped people to 'take a psychological step'.

This final theme is interesting because it does not square with the analysis that has gone before. I argued that RPL was influenced by the pedagogic discourse of the diploma and departmental context and designed to interact with candidates' prior learning, albeit in a limited way and as a means to an end. A therapeutic approach such as that represented in this theme is at odds with that process, which suggests that it was *not* our intention. I would therefore hypothesise that competence pedagogic elements were interpreted by some of the candidates in a *particularly* therapeutic way. I will revisit this issue. It represents potentially a powerful example of Bernstein's gap between transmission and acquisition.

The above analysis clearly supports earlier claims that the competence elements in the RPL pedagogy were very significant. This is not surprising given Bernstein's observation that the competence mode is frequently deployed in 'repair sections' of official education, to boost confidence and overcome fears. Most candidates needed the competence aspects of RPL. I would claim that this was mainly because of what it was *not* - i.e. not formal performance mode, which would have driven them away. The analysis suggests that different candidates had different experiences of competence pedagogy depending on their own practice, experience and needs. Marie's understanding for example, is very much in the progressive/therapeutic mode, whereas those candidates with politicised NGO backgrounds (Petra, Deborah and Oscar) incline to a more populist or radical interpretation of the competence pedagogy.

Not only competence

I have claimed performance pedagogy and strong framings alternated and were interspersed with competence pedagogy between and within activities, and that performance pedagogy was particularly evident in the gradual foregrounding of disciplinary and institutional values. Data suggest that candidates were well aware of this, at the same time as they embraced the competence pedagogy¹⁵⁵. First, there are many references to the *facilitators being a visible locus of institutional power* – with a normative plan, ‘total power’ and ‘authority’ as ‘gatekeepers’. Freda believed we ‘had a grand plan and an agenda as in your normal educative exercises...there was a meaning behind most things’. For her, as facilitators, we ‘had total control over access’. Michael had a similar view:

You were the authority figures. You were the people who said yah or nay. You were the people that said, ‘OK, I think this is of the required standard. You can submit that to the Board or the panel...if it wasn’t up to the standard you’d have never let it go through. So there was that gate-keeper approach at that particular point. And I was quite happy about that.

Secondly, there are references to *explicit, yet supportive pedagogies*. ‘Scaffolding’ found its way into Marie’s vocabulary - ‘the RPL process provided the scaffolding’ (First interview). Michael (using ORF discourse) referred to ‘enabling outcomes’. Freda mentioned ‘assistance in engaging with the text...that was incredibly important and grounding’ (First interview). Other candidates referred to explicit aspects of the pedagogy in the following terms: ‘it cuts it into pieces and then you understand’ (Vusi), ‘locating practice in the bigger picture...teaching

¹⁵⁵ See Petra’s comments above.

...some of the practical skills of putting a portfolio together' (Petra, first interview), 'a quick tutorial in writing in a structured way' (Petra).

Bernstein's performance pedagogy is based on differentiation and external goals. In candidate data, this was represented as *ongoing assessment* – a third theme. Petra 'truly believed there was ongoing assessment'. Marie noted how she willingly succumbed to ongoing assessment: 'the point is that during that process you know you are being assessed, you've made the decision to go through that'. For Petra, the ongoing assessment had a benign 'competence' quality to it, as in: 'it never felt like we were really being tested'. For Oscar, ongoing assessment compared favourably with his previous experiences in formal education:

...not in the way that I felt people like yourself and others were kind of measuring us in the way the system did in the past. I didn't get a sense of that...it wasn't a case of – there are these bland measurements – instruments – that you come in and we'll help you to identify or understand what it's about and then – you're on your own...It wasn't these bland measurements or indicators that you were using just to meet university criteria...

The above analysis suggests the competence model is therefore more complex than a simple obfuscatory mechanism. Boosting confidence and overcoming fears necessitate something like competence pedagogy, despite its ambiguities over power and control.

Recontextualisation via perspective: decoding signals

This piece of analysis refers to ways in which candidates actively addressed the pedagogic mixture of RPL, and the tacit requirement to understand the RPL gaze and reflect it back to us.

Facilitators as signalling

There are a number of references to facilitators as signalling. For Marie, our signals were ‘embedded’ in the process, with the imperative that one ‘get it’:

Judy: How did we communicate that to you?

Marie: You didn’t – you absolutely didn’t. I think it was embedded in the process. So it did enable one to get it. I would think if one didn’t get it – that would be a criterion for not making it.

For Freda, signals were communicated through language and texts that required ‘certain academic phrases, a level of writing, a level of understanding and a way of seeing the world and possible application’. She added that our style of questioning acted as a signal of what we valued: ‘I knew that in terms of the questioning we were being looked at in terms of our ability to understand an academic text or reconstruct an academic text’. Similarly, for Deborah, signals were embedded in the texts, style and types of questions asked:

Judy: How did we communicate it – Frances and I?

Deborah: It was a taste of the papers...The texts and dealing with the texts – as a group – but it was the way the facilitators drew... and the questions that you asked etc., that also conveys a code.

Signalling was also noted by academics. In that regard, James’s reference to Robert is a useful starting point. According to James, Robert’s critique would have been: ‘this is very signal-based – you’re giving signals’. Rosy highlighted some of the very subtle signalling that

happens in adult education practice via body language: ‘I’m aware of how much we do it imperceptibly in our reactions – a brightening of the eye...’

The above analysis suggests that candidates recognised that there was a wolf (performance pedagogy) somewhere in the sheep’s clothing (competence pedagogy). Put another way, there were distributive and evaluative rules at work, within the comfort zone provided by the competence mode.

Candidates as readers of the signals

What made the candidates so predisposed to reading facilitators’ signals? There is a tranche of data suggesting that they were a determined set of *individuals*; that they entered RPL as *motivated, confident and experienced active learners* (despite their expressed self-doubts). Marie captured the sense of motivation and agency well in the group focus interview: ‘the people that applied, applied because they were coming from a space of saying “hey, I have experience within a practice of adult education that is relevant”’. Data from Frances corroborates the view that individual motivation was a factor, especially for those candidates who responded directly to our publicity:

I think there's also the whole thing of motivation for learning. And I think those students came wanting to do it. It was explicit. They applied because of the flyer. They were there because they wanted the challenge. Except Petra funnily enough because she had applied for the certificate first. And Vusi.

Michael coded it as 'determination': 'I think all of us had a common goal. We all wanted to get into the course...I was determined to make the thing work'. Freda spoke of pre-existing 'confidence': 'I think you have to have a certain level of confidence in your own abilities to have applied for RPL in the first place'. Among candidates who were invited to apply, Petra (in her first interview) also expressed determination - 'with me there is always a determination'. But for Vusi it was a different story (and a troubling one, to which I will return): 'I just wanted to be on the certificate. I remember not really understanding what the questions were saying (i.e. on the application form) and you must have read it and said 'hey, this guy's got experience'.

There is a significant theme suggesting that candidates were not only active individual learners but also *active social learners*. Although Vygotskian notions of social learning and peer groupings were built into the RPL pedagogy, data suggest that this exceeded facilitators' expectations. Frances noted the speed and intensity with which this happened:

There they were, four days into knowing each other, and there was a sense of peer support as opposed to such individualised stuff. Maybe we were lucky with the candidates but I think that we set it up in such a way that...we structured activities for them to do in groups and I think that was powerful...I think there were social kinds of learning. They worked together and helped each other. That was very powerful to see...it became a social process as opposed to a purely individual one. Their product was individual but the process was social. And I think that's really significant. It was an incredibly social process. What I gathered from them at the end was that was an incredibly powerful thing...

Deborah referred to facilitator encouragement to work in a social learning way: 'the group was encouraged to create their own process'. Significantly, she also voiced a vigorous and

emphatic sense of the agency of the group in this, over and above facilitators' planning. For her, the group shaped the social learning practice: 'But you didn't do it yourselves...we created that'.

Other candidates referred positively to *working and learning together*. Michael valued the 'team-work'. Vusi appreciated 'group discussions'. Freda valued the 'group reflecting', the 'group journalising' and 'working through it with the group'. She commented on this in both of her interviews in a very consistent way. In her first interview, she said, 'the text did come as a shock', but 'working through it with the group with your support' meant that she emerged 'with something of value and knew where and how I had got it'. In her second interview, she referred (in a similar way) to the contributions of others - 'and that was the influence and the confidence they brought – that type of sharing, reflecting, journalising'. For Oscar, social learning was about going through things together in collective and 'participatory' ways: 'yes we were part of a group and [would] go through this process together. I don't think I doubted for one moment that this was a bit of a participatory process'. For Deborah, speaking very much as an educator, the group process (and processing) and group agency were key: 'So there was a group to process things and the group were encouraged to create their own process as well – was key to that very successful learning intervention'.

It is interesting to note the different languages candidates used to refer to 'social learning' – individuals in a group (Freda), the participatory language of trade union work (Oscar), the organisational language of the private sector (Michael), the activist language of group agency (Deborah), etc. Like the therapy issue, this is another instance of each candidate shaping the RPL process in their own image, according to their own experience of non-formal pedagogy (progressive/therapeutic, populist or radical, to use Bernstein's modes).

Over and above the general value accorded to 'working together' was a theme of *working things out and cracking the code together*. Vusi noted how he learnt from others' analysis of a text, 'so from that one [the Fotheringham *et al.* text], when I listened to people analysing it – so, I now began to reflect on my own kind of experience'. Likewise, Oscar noted the specific benefits of working and learning together in relation to decoding texts and learning from other candidates' questions:

...the Usher paper was there and initially it felt quite inaccessible. By the time we had discussed it (before we wrote) – the fact that there were questions asked – it became more prevalent to me what was important – from the others asking questions at least.

Deborah specifically described the act of 'checking with each other': 'For us as a group we would talk about it - "Where are we?" and kind of check with each other - "What's needed?" "What's required?" "What's being asked for?" Whether it's OK.... "This is what they want from us"'. She suggested that candidates consciously used the facilitation and facilitators as 'tools' to assess what the university wanted. She referred to 'them' (the university), 'not you' (the facilitators): 'My experience of you was as a mediator. You were kind of mediators between the academic institution and this group. We were using you as well, to decode'. This confirms the competence idea that as facilitators we were on the 'candidates' side'. Deborah added that, for her (and in her view for others in the group), the process of picking up the signals was itself tacit – intuitive, embodied, unconscious: 'But it was almost on a feeling level and quite unconscious – especially for us as a group of RPL learners...Our antennae were out – we were listening on many levels'.

Frances and Rosy commented on how unusual this was. For Frances, it was 'quite a radical move'. Rosy expressed surprise: 'So they were consciously working that out all the time...it wasn't just you and the students but there were layers of mediation happening?' James's view was that the 'RPL process had a strong in-built ideology system' and that the candidates 'worked it out' (Notes from assessors' meeting: 2).

The above analysis suggests that candidates were *very* active in developing the notion of social learning. A couple of them were a little resistant to this. Petra found the pace in groups rather slow, and Michael was used to working alone, with no history of collective working:

There were times when I was a little bit at sea you know. I used to look at things and think 'why do we have to work in groups?' Bearing in mind that I had come out of a loner situation where everything I had done on my own you know...

What were the unexpected effects of this social learning? First, it created a *convergence of thinking* – a sort of 'group think'. Certain candidates took leads from other candidates. Freda seemed to pick up on Marie's therapeutic discourse. For example, they both referred to RPL as being 'about ways of being and ways of seeing'. Some outcomes of the social pedagogy showed in portfolios, where, for example, both Vusi and Oscar wrote about the Usher text in terms of approaches that might 'confuse' students. The boundary between the 'social process/group think' and 'individual think' blurred at times. Everyone came to use the same specialised language – with such vocabulary as 'disembedded', 'destabilised', 'scaffolded'.

Secondly, social learning engendered a *closeness and intimacy* within the group – an extension of individualised competence pedagogy to an intra-group level. James, saw it as 'bonding': 'I

had a sense that there was bonding going on. That you and Frances were bonding with those students very intensely'. He referred it as 'merging interior discourses'. For Deborah it was about reducing isolation, 'so, I wasn't alone. There was a group...' For Marie (in therapeutic vein), it was about reducing isolation through seeing others' insecurities: 'The workshop in terms of the whole process was key. Because of other learners being present and seeing their insecurities coming out and saying "OK, you're not alone"'.

With closeness and intimacy (and facilitators' care-giving) came a sense of *responsibility to group and process*¹⁵⁶. Vusi expressed his sense that in the group as a whole there was, 'the willingness from the learners not to disappoint you guys'. Oscar was concerned not to let the group down by not contributing enough:

If anything I felt that I was letting the group down in that I wasn't contributing as much as I could have. Not 'could have' because I don't think I could have contributed more...maybe a bit of inferiority feeling that I wasn't perhaps doing enough through some of the discussions that were happening.

¹⁵⁶ A sort of co-dependency – reciprocal relationships of loyalty and gratitude.

Freda was very forthcoming about responsibility. For her, RPL candidates 'had entered into something...a contract' with obligations to work and not hold others back. As a result, she experienced tension when people did not, in her view, honour the terms of the contract: 'the only tension rose out of people who didn't do the reading and it applied to everybody not a particular person...they'd let the group down or were pulling everybody backwards when we need to go forwards'.

A common critique of competence pedagogy is that it leaves the learners to second guess what counts. The above analysis foregrounds signalling. Candidates referred to many ways in which they were continuously monitoring the RPL process for signals – the texts, our language, our questions, our reactions. Deborah's response is fascinating because it suggests this was not only a conscious process but an embodied process of sensing. References to our transmission of a way of seeing and being in the world suggest something more than a recontextualisation of prior learning: perhaps a recontextualisation of identity and consciousness.

I would claim that candidates utilised social learning and peer reference groups to make visible what was invisible, through 'reading' the facilitators and facilitation, and through pooling ideas developed social learning into a robust pedagogic tool. In this process they took up mixed and multi-layered learner-teacher identities, using social learning to acquire our gaze. Analysis suggests that the whole was greater than the sum of the parts - Vygotsky's zone of proximal development in action.

Conclusions

The above analysis brought to the surface many issues concerning my knowledge, pedagogy, power and identity research questions. I make claims in the following thematic areas:

The RPL 'gaze'

Bernstein's theories led me to claim that two recontextualising principles were tacitly at work during the RPL curriculum design and implementation processes. These informed the pedagogic discourse of RPL. On the strength of the foregoing analysis, I can now claim that the second recontextualising principle¹⁵⁷ was the RPL gaze, to which texture can be added. We wanted candidates who could reflect critically (and in a particular and complex way) on themselves and their practice:

- with a commitment to the current constitutional value system;
- seeing things (self and educational interventions) in a historical and social context;
- seeing how context shapes choices and assumptions;
- posing problems and solving them taking account of context;
- seeing the relationships between ideal and reality – being self-critical;
- operating with a spirit of critical enquiry, deconstruction, questioning, problematisation and a lack of closure;
- having a suspicion of orthodoxies – old or new;

¹⁵⁷ A range of academic practices and standpoints were important: it was these that would count.

- having an ability to be provisional rather than universal – to take a storied approach to self and work, seeing self as text;
- appreciating the value of theory, especially critical social theory.

We also wanted candidates who could:

- understand and make sense of texts and tasks (including academic tasks);
- make connections and develop arguments and propositions in writing;
- compare and contrast texts with own learning from experience in writing;
- summarize in writing;
- analyse and evaluate (theorise) in writing;
- structure, develop and illustrate arguments and propositions in writing.

I would argue that all RPL pedagogic activities (culminating in the production of texts) ‘invited’ candidates to reflect/model the detail of the gaze back to us. That was what would count as ‘success’. Indeed, this was confirmed by the formal assessment of portfolios in the department. The pedagogic discourse of the diploma became the evaluative discourse of RPL. What counted was whether the candidates had recognised and realised enough of the pedagogic discourse of the diploma to succeed without support.

Comparing the diploma and RPL

The nature of the diploma was analysed in the Foucauldian chapter. In Bernstein’s terms, the diploma was a horizontal knowledge structure in collection code with relatively strong classifications of knowledge and a relatively strong grammar (to enhance the explanatory

dimension of the programme). It was therefore structured so as not to let too much outside knowledge over the boundary.

Because of these characteristics, I would argue that the RPL curriculum recontextualised fewer resources from horizontal discourse than most RPL processes. There are obvious similarities between the diploma and RPL which suggest that (as apprentices) we created an accurate version of the diploma's specialised language, one capable of interacting (however briefly) with prior experiential knowledge (some but by no means all of which would be horizontal discourse) and of bridging into the (unchallenged) diploma curriculum. Our apprentice status raises the possibility that our hesitant and weak pedagogic framing was partly a result of our lack of certainty about the diploma discourse. According to the schema of types of RPL, this pilot was clearly in the one-way bridge, new learning, hard(ish) knowledge boundary mode.

RPL as competence pedagogy

There is a philosophical confluence between Bernstein's competence pedagogy and the humanistic promise of the concept and practice of much RPL (as discussed in the Subject Review). Both emphasise the realisation of competence that already exists, and differences rather than deficit; both hold out emancipatory promise at various levels; both privilege learner control and agency; both claim to focus on the whole person; and both assume and/or encourage the weak classification of knowledge. The crucial difference is that Bernstein conceptualises competence as *by no means* devoid of power and control, whereas many proponents of RPL take the view that RPL practices *are* devoid of these things. The RPL orthodoxy is that rather than proffering an appearance of equality, RPL *is* equality.

However, in this pilot, competence pedagogy fulfilled some very valuable functions in supporting candidates at personal levels and in not breaking apart their 'comfort zones'. They needed the affirmation. Without it they might not have overcome their anxieties and fears about returning to formal education, and have been unable to engage so purposefully with the process. Recall, for example, how the introduction of the Usher task filled the candidates with an intense fear of failure. I would claim that a separation occurred. The personal attributes of the competence model were embraced by the candidates; the disguising of power and control was not.

The trade-off, for Bernstein, is a deeper level of pedagogic socialisation occasioned by competence pedagogy. The analysis suggests that this was indeed the case in this pilot, most particularly in the perceived 'powerfulness' of the process and the extent to which candidates invested their identities in it.

Different readings of competence within the group

Competence meant different things to different people. I would argue that the model we deployed was an amalgam of Bernstein's therapeutic, populist and radical modes upon which candidates laminated particular readings. For some it became therapeutic; for others it became a political counterpart to discriminatory formal education. For others again, it became an extension of people's education and resonated with their own practice as adult educators. The

candidates made it into whatever they needed it to be. Some had individualistic understandings of experience and reflection; others had more populist and/or radical versions¹⁵⁸.

The performance pedagogic model in this pilot

I would claim that the performance pedagogic elements in this pilot were modelled on those of the diploma, that is, Bernstein's autonomous mode. This is the introjected mode of pedagogy associated with vertical discourse and liberal academia. The most consistent manifestations were the future orientation, focus on outputs (texts) and increasing dominance of academic logic and institutional requirements. These culminated in the Usher text, although the Fotheringham *et al.* paper was perhaps closer to the pedagogic discourse of the RPL process (and the diploma). The drift was towards the academic and this was read as 'progression'.

Strong framing very often links to performance pedagogy. In this pilot, two things were consistently strongly framed – selection and timing. I would claim that this allowed us, as facilitators, to keep control over the amount of 'outside'/prior learning that entered that process (the first recontextualising principle), and to avoid becoming overwhelmed by the competence mode. As for rules of communication, we spelled these out more explicitly as the pilot 'progressed'. However, we relied on texts to do the teaching for us and to signal our gaze, leaving us free to adopt the personal competence style. In earlier stages, rules of communication were more implicit and *apparently* weakly framed - for example, by having an informal discussion with pre-scripted outcomes. In some circumstances, therefore, we kept control over the rules of communication whilst appearing not to.

¹⁵⁸ Morphet (1985: 380) calls this phenomenon (common in non-formal education), 'submerged private curricula'.

The notion of pacing was weakly framed consistently. We did not concern ourselves with each individual candidate's 'rate of acquisition' (because we were not officially teaching?). Rather, we stayed in the competence mode of absence of grading. This was the way in which 'failure' became the learners' responsibility, rather than being theorised in curriculum terms¹⁵⁹. Failure, of course, is a feature of performance not competence pedagogy. I would claim that this pilot recruited the term 'scaffolding' to refer to the more strongly framed activities.

Competence to soften performance

Given that competence and performance are analytical, rather than empirical, concepts, it is no surprise to see them both in operation at the same time. There was a complex intertwining of the two. In several instances, competence preceded performance within the same activity - for example, the juxtaposition of the Boud *et al.* text with the lifeline activity, and the framing of candidate ETD learning by the Quality Framework. The deployment of competence was (tacitly) based on the need to balance personal affirmation and institutional requirements. But any venture into competence mode was quickly constrained by a performance activity. Where there was competence, performance was never far away. This leads me to claim that the competence approach was used to soften the impact of the formal (and dominant) performance pedagogic model.

RPL as challenging the diploma?

The analysis throws light on to the notion of challenge (or lack of it). There were several 'gaps' in the RPL curriculum design and implementation process which we did indeed miss.

¹⁵⁹ Or in terms of knowledge, pedagogy, power and identity – which I trust they will be by the end of this thesis.

The analysis identified three of these. We 'chose' to use the criteria to prescribe the RPL curriculum; to use texts, not the raw material of candidates' experience; to align the RPL curriculum with the diploma through our selection of particular texts. After the departmental workshop, we did not exploit any 'gap' through which we could have engaged with power and control. Instead, our RPL process was regulated by the distributive rules of the department and the pedagogic discourse of the diploma.

I would argue that the department (in the PWG sub-group meetings) offered us opportunities to engage theoretically with the diploma curriculum, but offered them in a very weakly framed way. In order for us to take up the challenges, they needed to be more explicitly spelled out for us (more strongly framed). We were apprentices and couldn't read the departmental signals. We were operating at the boundaries of our knowledge at the time. We did not have enough theory to conceptualise an approach to RPL that challenged the diploma. Only now, in this thesis, am I pursuing that. But why did the department not frame the nature of the challenge more strongly for us as apprentices? Why did they hold back so?

Analysis has shown that certain types of RPL *are* capable of challenging curricula code and that knowledge classifications can be weakened. If RPL (deploying various pedagogical combinations) can help people over an insulated boundary, then that insulation proves to be more permeable than envisaged. In Bernstein's terms, this would engender a weakening of curriculum identity as the latter is rendered closer to other categories of knowledge. It would also change the distributive rules (the means of distributing access to knowledge). The question is whether or not this is done for 'progressive' reasons. This relates to Bernstein's question of 'whose regulator, what consciousness and for whom?' In the present case, I would

claim that the department held back because the social project of the diploma was seen as more progressive than the social project of RPL.

Social learning and the gap

Although as facilitators we did not have the theory to challenge the diploma, I have argued that there is a further gap - between transmission and acquisition. Analysis has illustrated how unusually adept some of the candidates became at understanding the hidden curricula of the competence pedagogy. They recognised that there was a wolf lurking in the sheep's clothing. Consequently, they continually monitored the RPL process for signals that the competence mode was softening power and control, or removing them from view. Candidates collaborated with each other in decoding our pedagogic discourse. Those candidates with a background of people's education (Bernstein's populist or radical mode) were best equipped to do this. They pooled resources to 'read' the invisibility of the competence model. They also created a space which was therapeutic and supportive – in ways that went beyond our intentions. They worked out the relationship between competence and performance pedagogies, and subsequently decoded the RPL gaze. They taught themselves - reframed our weak framing in a stronger way.

Our weak framing allowed candidates to intervene in the rules of communication. Bernstein's framing concepts of instructional and regulative discourse take this matter a little further. The regulative discourse embeds the instructional. The former is about social order, social relations, social identities, hierarchies, authority relations, modes of conduct etc. It can be implicit or explicit. The latter is about the framing values of sequencing, timing and pacing. I would claim that some candidates utilised social learning and peer reference groups to

appropriate the regulative discourse to teach themselves and so created new social relations, identities and modes of conduct. This was a move against the power of the RPL process, but also towards the power of the institution.

I am aware that many things are glossed over in the above homogenizations. Were *all* candidates equally able to benefit from, and participate in the active social pedagogy? Could *everyone* play a part in decoding the signals? Who was included in or excluded from the 'closeness and intimacy'? More needs to be understood about the patterns of contiguity and continuity (and the converse) for individual candidates within the RPL pilot - that is, between prior experiential knowledge and the RPL gaze. I now turn to this, my first research question.

Relationships between knowledges

This piece of analysis links candidates' prior experiential knowledge to the RPL gaze and pedagogy. I have referred to the RPL assessment criteria as lying at the crossover of three 'roles' (depicted as three intersecting circles)¹⁶⁰ – those of lifelong learner, adult education practitioner, and potential HE learner. During the first weekend of the RPL process, these roles were presented differently. The criteria were positioned in front of the latter two roles/circles, which in turn were in front of the lifelong learner role. This suggested that the lifelong learner role was being reargrounded. My analytical task in this part of the chapter is to bring that, and my first research question, to the fore in a survey of the life-work-education backgrounds of five of the seven RPL candidates¹⁶¹. I analyse contiguities, congruences, continuities, distances, divergences and ruptures between prior experiential knowledge and the gaze of RPL in order to explore what knowledge patterns correlated with 'success' (or otherwise) in this context, and to strengthen what Starr-Glass (2002) calls the 'predictive validity' of RPL (see Subject Review). I look at each candidate as 'a person in the world' (Malcolm and Zukas 2003: 447), following Billet (2001: 68), who argues, 'Much of individuals' engagement in social practice is premised on and can be understood by their personal histories...which result in particular ways of knowing'.

¹⁶⁰ See orientation day, activity 3.

¹⁶¹ Selected as being the most illustrative and atypical cases.

Vusi - prior experiential knowledge and the RPL gaze: 'how you see me is sometimes not a true reflection of what I know'

At the time of RPL, Vusi was a supervisor in a university hall of residence. In his portfolio, he represented himself in terms of two identities - the rural self and the urban self. His portfolio texts capture his recall of the trauma of forced removals including relocation to an African township, and of his fierce resistance to the suppression of indigenous languages, knowledge and cultures:

To be forcefully removed from the town and suburbs, a campaign of Separate Development Act by the Verwoerdian decade which was not accepted by races concerned. It was horrendous and designed to manipulate blacks, for instance creation of an inferior education, harassed and drove away to stay in match-box houses, marginalising of other races, suppressing other races cultures, psychologically instilling an inferiority complex on other races (Portfolio text 1: 1).

Vusi talks and writes at length about the paucity of Bantu education. In his portfolio (Text 2: 4) he offered the following example:

...the ratio of pupils was 80:1. We had this teacher who would come and sit on his table, start reading from his text book not caring whether we as learners are in possession of such text books. He would read and then after the bell has rung, indicating that the period has ended, close his book and go out of the classroom and say 'Goodbye, see you tomorrow'. What developed from that class was hatred of the teacher because of failure rate, fear and people opting to bunk his period.

Vusi makes reference to the strategies pupils used in that era (the sixties) – more passive modes of resistance than the insurrections and revolts of the late seventies and early eighties:

‘All we did was just to be passive, pretending to be attentive to what he was teaching and at the end of the day we were just like empty vessels’. Evidence suggests powerfully negative experiences of schooling and consequent lack of resources from formal education. Except for an early love of drama: ‘My first love for it started from 1962 while we were put on our paces in a school project doing standard six in a play about Rumpelstilskin’.

As he approached his teenage years, Vusi was sent by his parents from the urban township to the rural areas in order to be schooled in traditional skills (such as farming) and ceremonial rituals (such as slaughtering) as a corrective to ‘the biasness my family has towards [against?] the western culture’. He refers to this time as ‘learning a culture’. Speaking of ritual slaughter, for example, he makes the case that he was ‘conscientised’ that if he did not do such things his ‘life will not be a satisfying one’ (Portfolio text 1:2). He was inducted into traditional African custom: ‘I was taught to do these things by my guardian’. Portfolio data show a traditional cultural identity that demanded disciplined compliance with patriarchal and religious hierarchies (‘elderly male’, ‘father’s footsteps’, ‘Abraham and his son’, ‘Ancestors delivering messages unto him’). There is a sense of hierarchical pre-ordained relationships, as in, ‘it is imperative in our communities to follow in our father’s footsteps’ (Portfolio text 1: 2).

Evidence suggests that this traditional, customary identity became an important one for Vusi. He speaks of being initiated and positioned in a chain of traditional authority and respect. Over time, he became a leader of clan ceremonies: ‘Sometimes, they would request me to be a co-ordinator, and that’s why I gained the experience in as much as my clan is using me’ (Portfolio text 1: 1).

The adult Vusi returned to urban life. It is clear that his confidence and leadership abilities, developed in the rural areas, were, initially at least, highly transferable into civic and sports-

related activities of urban township life: 'I had so many social gatherings that I belonged to - karate instructor, rugby player, secretary of my street committee¹⁶². From there, the chairman, studying, attending night school - all that'. What was particularly significant about Vusi's return to urban life, was his involvement in drama under the mentorship of a political activist and university drama student who recognised his 'natural talent in acting'. Vusi joined his mentor's community drama group (political protest theatre): 'Most of our productions were concentrating in protest theatre which demonstrated the anger of the people'. This is where his informal educator-animator role began. When his mentor went into exile¹⁶³, Vusi took over as leader of the group. For a while the group thrived and was invited to perform abroad. However, as the decade of repression-resistance wore on, 'people were just disappearing, some were dying, and detained for obvious reasons', and the group began to suffer the repressive attentions of security forces. They were 'refused passports to travel overseas and the SAP¹⁶⁴ would come and be vigilant entering our rehearsal and people were full of fear...' (Portfolio text 1: 3). Vusi explains that he attempted to keep things going by 'motivational talk' – the talk of the clan elder/leader?

Over and above harassment by security forces, there were challenges inside the group, 'an influx of youths...very militant...school drop-outs' (Portfolio text 1: 3). Parts of the UDF had become militarised by Umkhonto guerrillas infiltrating back into the country. There was political cross-fire within the drama group regarding the political efficacy of links with the (despised) municipality: 'they needed to know why we could not be on our own so that the monies we were making could be ours, instead of being ploughed back into the city council coffers' (Portfolio text 1: 3). Vusi was committed to the group retaining its link with the

¹⁶² See Introduction for discussion about the UDF in the eighties.

¹⁶³ He joined Umkhonto weSizwe (MK) and left the country to receive military training.

¹⁶⁴ South African Police.

municipality largely because 'during that decade it was not easy to open current accounts in financial institutions to enable us to operate professionally'. His attempts to maintain a peace were not successful and were accompanied by allegations of corruption, financial mismanagement and spying:

...the atmosphere changed, there were bad scenes of shouting abuse, accusations of using the money for our own benefits. All these accusations were directed to the Leader, the drama working committee including me. By this time it was just chaos and accusations that we were all informers pretending to be with the communities and all sorts of unfounded assumptions which they could not prove¹⁶⁵ (Portfolio text 1: 4).

Vusi seems to have been caught between the drama project, the repressive practices of the apartheid authorities, the practicalities of going professional and the demands/mood of the youth. The theatre group could not continue.

The foregoing analysis suggests that, for a time at least, there was some continuity between Vusi's leadership of traditional ceremonies in the rural areas and their urban counterparts in township civic life and theatre, albeit differently profiled against the political struggles and conflicts of the time. The same resources perhaps sustain him in his work with students in the university residence.

¹⁶⁵ This needs to be seen against the backdrop of the culture of violence of the time, particularly the utilization of government trained vigilante groups.

Resources in congruence with the RPL gaze

I would claim that there were some continuities and congruences between Vusi's prior experiential knowledge and the RPL gaze, in his sense of location and social context, a longstanding learner identity in mentorship-apprentice mode, a commitment to learner-centredness, and identification with the social element of the RPL pedagogy, as follows:

Located historically and socially

His political experience had resonances with the gaze, involving a commitment to the new value system and the importance of history and social context in educational interventions. He also had a highly developed sense of 'the social' as social responsibility, a commitment to the common good (for example, in his desire to use his educator status to 'help' and 'empower disadvantaged communities', to 'share his little knowledge') and a general view of himself as 'just a person who wants to do something'.

Learning as apprenticeship

Alongside an impoverished and discriminatory formal education, there is an ongoing strand of informal learning via mentorship - first, as part of the rural community and clan, and secondly, with his drama mentor. There is a sense of Vusi *always* being a learner, as in: 'So, I regarded whoever was my mentor as a teacher and myself as a learner'. Because of this, he readily took on a learner identity in RPL. The mentorship and apprenticeship that were important features of Vusi's experience of learning were also features of the competence pedagogy of RPL (except that in the latter the framing was very much weaker).

Commitment to learner-centredness

Data suggest that Vusi recognised and responded positively to the learner-centredness of the RPL pedagogy. He saw it as contrasting strongly with the oppressive didacticism of Bantu education. Elements of the pedagogy of RPL thus coincided with Vusi's idea of what a good formal education might have been. This comes through most clearly in his Usher text. For example, it is clear that Vusi does not support passive learning. He stresses the importance of teachers who are fair, who support and believe in learners and who offer opportunities for forms of learning that validate student experience and support their enquiring minds: 'The role of the teacher, he has to remain neutral...If the student does not have the support of the teacher....' He also denounces the sort of teachers who present themselves as infallible. All in all, stimulated by Usher's text, he presents his 'ideal pedagogy', one that is concerned with 'cultivating'¹⁶⁶ students and 'reflecting and bridging learning' (Portfolio text 2: 3).

Valuing of social learning

Data suggest Vusi valued the social and participatory nature of the RPL pedagogy – the working and learning with others, especially learning from the others' views and questions, and decoding what the RPL process was requiring: 'When I listened to the other people, their reflections, I realised we were in a similar boat, although the issues were not the same...when I heard other people and how you explained, I began to understand what it needed'.

Distances from the RPL gaze

¹⁶⁶ The agricultural metaphor is interesting.

On the other hand, many aspects of Vusi's knowledge and identities were divergent from this particular RPL gaze. Associated with his traditional knowledge bases and religion is a worldview that in many ways is conformist – the hierarchical pre-ordained relationships referred to above. This is a long way from the provisionality and lack of closure that permeated the RPL discourse. The former bring forth notions of a self fashioned in the values of obedience and discipline, a great distance from the problematisation and deconstructive critical analysis favoured by academia and the 'self as text' notion within the RPL process.

Vusi's educator identity was very informal, having no connection with broader discourses around (adult) education and policy. But his pedagogical approach was *particularly* formal, perhaps modelled on his own disciplined apprenticeships. Such an approach is at a distance from the hybrid pedagogy of the RPL process and its assumptions about educator identity. For example, in the following quotation, Vusi brings a formal approach and religious overtones together, in 'make him a better person': 'But before disciplining [workers in the hall of residence], I allow him to put his side of the story... Then the worker is disciplined, we discipline him with the aim to educate and make him a better person' (Portfolio text 2: 4).

Vusi came from strong oral, not literate, traditions. While there was a strong oral dimension to the RPL process, it centred on a sort of 'honesty' and personal disclosure that bordered on the therapeutic, which was not part of Vusi's discursive repertoire. Thus, although Vusi appeared to be committed to the pedagogy of RPL, he was perhaps not positioned to draw the sustenance from its psychological/therapeutic elements that other candidates could¹⁶⁷.

¹⁶⁷ This links to Rosy's point about the introspective, reflective mode prioritised in much university-based adult education.

Recognising and realising the gaze

Although some of Vusi's prior experiential knowledge (and associated identities) were (potentially) congruent with the RPL gaze, there is evidence to suggest that he did not always recognise them as such. He was not sure what the context demanded. He seemed to misread the nature of the two RPL tasks. In his interview, he referred to the tasks in the following way, 'In fact, we had to do some reading to see how you fit in that particular person's experience'. Whilst this is true to an extent, it misses the points of critical engagement and analysis and points to recognition and realisation difficulties.

Another example of such difficulties is where he says he did not know which of his 'cultural' experiences to focus on in his portfolio: '...we were talking about experience, I did not know...because I was involved in so many things...I did not know what to choose. So, it was quite a multi-choice...' How was the term 'culture' used in the RPL process? It was first introduced via the Boud *et al.* text – as his fifth proposition: 'Learning is socially and culturally constructed'. It is also an aspect of the Fotheringham *et al.* paper, where different understandings of an education intervention prevail (some of which were termed 'cross-cultural'). Vusi said that he 'did not understand culture as it is'. If there was a lack of recognition here, it would seem to have been around culture as 'lived experience' and culture defined in a sociological way within RPL (as socio-cultural). That he found it difficult to recognise this aspect of the RPL gaze is evidenced in the following quote where he 'saw the necessity to bring [culture] out' by:

...spreading my wings and letting you see my experiences, culture. I don't know whether you thought this guy is a fool to mention such personal things... you know I said things that I was

not supposed to but I don't have a problem with that...it was an idea to let you get to know me, kind of person - would you create something for a person who has been through this and this? (First interview).

Vusi is one of two candidates (both black) that foreground language issues in their portfolios and interviews. The other candidate, Oscar, identifies the issue as 'one which for me was very important and why I kept thinking of Vusi and what that meant'. Vusi does not speak or write about his language proficiency (except to mention language switching in the theatre group plays, and that before forced removal he did not speak Xhosa). Rather, he focuses on his 'lack' of English: 'My main problem that I had was lack of expressing myself effectively in the Queen's language' (Portfolio motivation: 1). There is a sense of his difficulties with English in his portfolio texts. Very often these are minor grammatical and spelling errors which do not interfere with meaning. There is, however, a more generalised sense of a recognition and realisation difficulty lying somewhere along the intersection of English as a Second Language and the RPL gaze.

In his second text, Vusi does not communicate an understanding of the Usher paper, although he starts off in a promising way: 'At the beginning of Usher's paper, he is voicing his concern about the adult educator predicament of utilising students experience productively in the classroom environment' (Portfolio text 2:1).

The content and form of Usher's text *are* difficult. With regard to content, Vusi had little or no practice at using students' experience as a resource for active learning (although the idea appeals to him). His lack of recognition rules is illustrated by the way he offers some rather pat strategies, the teaching of information retrieval skills and communicative activities, as ways to overcome what Usher presents as the complex, multifaceted pedagogic problem of

active learning: 'To eradicate the lack of expressing ones knowledge, the person should be introduced or familiarised to group discussions debates, how to utilise the library, in this way he is bound to have the development of meanings...' (Portfolio text 2: 2). According to Vusi, Usher describes passive learning as a process where, 'knowledge is transferred from the external source into the head's of the learner'. Vusi gives as an example of this a student cheating by getting someone else to do his homework. Has he not grasped the concept of passive learning? Is he seeing passive learning in much broader terms than a pedagogic strategy? Or is it a linguistic issue, whereby 'external source' is understood as a sort of ghost-writer?

He takes issue (twice) with Usher's distinction between working with specific experiences and generalizations. He seems to be assuming that Usher, in talking about strategies en route to active learning, is making a general statement about all pedagogy:

I totally disagree with this statement that every personal learning experience must be about the specific experience and there must be no generalizations...I personally feel that it is not always a wonderful idea to be specific when you don't know all the facts in front of you before generalising (Portfolio text 2: 1-5).

Data suggest that these recognition difficulties led to him not being able fully or clearly to 'realise' or represent himself within the constraints of the RPL gaze. In his interview, Robert referred to RPL as a game, saying that there was one candidate who could not 'play the game that you had invented'. James put it more graphically, in terms of transmitters and antennae. For him, the RPL transmitter was miniscule compared to the big transmitter of political change, to which Vusi's antennae were tuned:

They [Vusi's antennae] were tuned into another transmitter – a transmitter of such power and of such public authority. It was such a dominant transmitter and his assumption must have been 'all I have to do is speak in the terms of this transmission and of course, they'll see...

Vusi did however seem to be aware of his recognition difficulties with the Usher text and with RPL more broadly. A critical incident within the RPL process suggested the frustration this caused him. On arriving late for a session, he drew attention to blood on his jeans and informed the group that he was late because he had been slaughtering a bull in preparation for a funeral, as part of his pivotal role in a township burial society. This seems to have been a way of focusing the group's attention on the world in which he had status and position – important features of his identity not 'recognised' by RPL. He was drawing facilitators' attention to the social construction of knowledge in a much broader way than that referenced in the texts and discussions of the RPL process. Was it a call to the RPL facilitators to 'RPL themselves' and to 'recognise' the social embeddedness of their (our) own practice?

Discussion

There is a complex patterning of congruence/continuities and distance/dissonances with regard to Vusi's prior experiential knowledge and the RPL gaze, which needs to be problematised from both ends. Vusi was crucially positioned as a potential beneficiary of RPL in terms of the redress agenda. However, in this case, the RPL gaze was at a distance from and dissonant with his knowledge. Vusi was aware of this when he shared some of his knowledge via the blood on his trousers. He drew attention to it again in his Usher text where he wrote about a herbalist employed at a university medical school. He refers to relationships between knowledges (including 'subjugated knowledge') in his questioning of how the university would 'link his

knowledge of herbs and lecture room environment' (Portfolio text 2: 2) – presumably wondering how we would do the same.

The case of Vusi in RPL seems to be one of mutual lack of recognition. The RPL process (curriculum and pedagogy) was not orientated to his prior experiential knowledge or to his needs. The RPL pedagogy was signalling to him in ways he could not recognise. Vusi was also signalling – to the group and to the facilitators, but we did not recognise his signals.

Vusi's case surfaces many of the paradoxes of RPL as discussed in the Subject Review. For Vusi's knowledge to be in closer proximity to the RPL gaze, something very different was needed. Either, in Miriam's terms, a curriculum that foregrounded subjugated knowledge, which the diploma (and this RPL curriculum) did not. To do so would have changed the social project of the diploma to one, according to Robert and James, less progressive in the longer term.

Or, was what was needed a very differently theorised and conceptualised RPL pedagogy?

I would claim that his lack of recognition was increased by the tacit nature of the competence model and weak framing. In fact, the pedagogy of RPL acted as a barrier to communication and mutual learning, not a facilitator of it. The weak framing of RPL did not work for Vusi since it did not enable him to acquire the recognition and realisation rules. Vusi perhaps needed something more strongly framed - more of an explicit performance pedagogy, where the rule system was made visible.

Deborah - prior experiential knowledge and the RPL gaze: 'I was already in'

The analytical themes pertaining to Deborah show that *everything* she disclosed about knowledge and identity demonstrated continuity, congruence and contiguity. In fact, she expanded the terms of the RPL gaze, as the following analysis will show.

Resources in congruence with the RPL gaze

A critical reflective practitioner

At the time of RPL, Deborah was a development educator in a rural NGO concerned with 'addressing malnutrition by engaging community members in development interventions, which focus on the causes of malnutrition, rather than distributing food to the hungry' (Portfolio motivation: 3), a description which suggests political rather than charitable orientations. A central component of her educator approach was 'participatory learning action', a methodology that links to her valuing of informal learning, and which is grounded in 'meaningful participation by local residents in their own development'. Evidence suggests an approach rooted in a strong and radical acknowledgement of peoples' knowledge¹⁶⁸: She enumerates elements of the design of educational activities to support the participation of 'the invisible poorest' and to facilitate their involvement in identifying and exploring problems and opportunities. This, as she puts it, is an integral part of her commitment to 'authentic change',

¹⁶⁸ Having resonances with people's education and the UDF and Bernstein's populist and radical competence modes.

which she explains in a self-reflexive rather than doctrinaire way, as in the following example (selected from many):

The core difficulty of the teacher's role, for myself, is in staying alert to my own need for the relative comfort and security of being an expert. This applies as much to my identity as an anti-didactic facilitator as to those who believe in effective lecturing (Portfolio text 2: 6).

Here is clear evidence of Deborah's commitment to 'authentic change' – a powerfully modernist agenda, but one with an almost post-modern reflexivity.

Located historically and socially

Deborah's family/home life as a child/young adult was closely linked to political struggle. The personal and political were very close:

My childhood was surrounded by socio-economic and political discussions, and culminated in the disbanding of my family, in the first term of my matriculation year. Having overcome the disruptive divorce of my parents during my last year of primary school... The final dispersion of my family was due to the concrete threat of imprisonment for political dissent and activities, which result in both my mother and my brother scuttling off to England. The unjust murder, in detention, of a valued family friend and surrogate father, with whom I closely identified, and deeply admired, finally confirmed my rejection of a corrupt social system. The imprisonment of my own father after the Sharpeville calamity...was invoked to add to my overall justification for a wholesale rejection, which included the privileges of academia (Portfolio motivation: 2).

This is a story of political struggle alongside social/familial rupture and disintegration. What emerges for Deborah is a strongly stated, oppositional, counter-cultural political identity as a dissident. Her political, anti-establishment stance is clearly evident in such phrases as 'the unjust murder', 'corrupt social system', the Sharpeville 'calamity' and 'wholesale rejection'.

As the reference to 'political discussions' suggests, Deborah's family and home life offered much exposure to discussion, critical debate and literature. As she says, 'I'd hear Marx and Marcuse being analysed in my environment'. She says that her family 'encouraged critical thinking, formulation of arguments...against mainstream thinking... and discussion of social realities and dynamics intrinsic to our South African context'. This seems to have resulted in a naturalised ability to locate herself and her work historically and sociologically. All of the above chime with the diploma programme generally and the gaze of RPL in particular.

A critical reflexive learner

Deborah speaks of her formal education in negative terms compared to her informal education: 'Formal education teaches one to write, not to be critical' (Group focus interview). Her experience of formal education was not entirely negative, however. In both interviews she refers to being a high achiever and enjoying exams. So, although she lacks a full formal education and higher education, her early life was replete with scholastic achievement, 'Older siblings who were academic achievers – competing for rewards, such as chocolate slabs for over 80%'.

Behind this experience of formal education, there is a history of informal intellectual learning. In the context of a political home, she had critical informal mentorship. She refers to 'intellectual mentors...family, friends...who took me on, consciously training me to "read between the lines" of newspapers, critique the Bible...great fun.' This suggests a critical deconstructive pedagogy. Despite its informality, data suggest a disciplined process of acquiring vertical discourse, supplemented by her self-education including reading critical social theory texts:

My informal self-education was selective, and biased towards social dissenters such as Herbert Marcuse, Paul Sartre, Ivan Illich and Paulo Freire. It is relevant to note that these readings, extensively discussed with friends, contributed to my predisposition to embracing certain theories of learning as an adult educator (Portfolio motivation: 2).

There is a sense of continuity in and across her learning life, with 'critical' and 'achievement' as key markers of that. She offers a sociological perspective on her 'informal formal' self-education identity, linking it to her privileged class position, having a 'home library and reading habits that offered a range of thick¹⁶⁹ literature' and the 'leisure and time to indulge in reading, intellectual development – a class privilege'.

¹⁶⁹ Interesting methodological/academic vocabulary.

Importance of social learning

The analysis has already shown the importance of social learning in Deborah's personal and professional lives. She is used to groups/communities and to 'belonging' to a counter-cultural movement. There are more data that strengthen the social theme. Deborah seems to have readily adopted a pedagogic role in relation to her peers at school. She talks of tutoring her fellow school pupils in essay writing: 'my enjoyment was mostly on tutoring my rebellious friends through their exams. This may well have been a significant early experience of the satisfaction of engaging the interest of reluctant learners' (Portfolio motivation: 2).

There is a social (and sociable) theme to her educator practice, with many portfolio references to 'sharing', 'ongoing discussion', 'shared reflections', 'interactions with colleagues'. She adopted a pedagogic role in relation to other RPL candidates whilst also actively learning from them: 'other peoples' ways of approaching things and thinking – it was so interesting to... you'd have to really really listen and find a way of understanding what they were saying – behind the way they were presenting it'. More than anyone else, Deborah expresses concern for the RPL group as a whole. For example, she enquired about the participants that dropped out after the orientation day wishing they were 'coming along with us'. She was especially concerned about Vusi, particularly her sense that his knowledge was not going to be consonant with the requirements of the RPL process:

Ah gee – that story of the killing of the bull of Vusi's...It was a mixture of 'wow' and a bit of despair that it actually wasn't going to be able to fit – and that we could take that knowledge and have it somehow with us – as a group of learners...It was like there was just a taste of what RPL could be like and then it was gone again.

All of the above examples resonate powerfully with the social pedagogy of RPL, and suggest that Deborah played a key role in shaping the pedagogy in that way. Such modes and activities, highly consonant with the RPL gaze, were part of her lexicon well before the RPL process.

Sense of the systemic and complex thinking

Deborah has a clear sense of the systemic; she can see connections between things – the personal, the professional, the political, the social and the global. The following remarkably sophisticated piece of academic discourse illustrates this very well. She discovered RPL whilst:

...searching for appropriate support, beyond the workplace, to strengthen the essential skills of the fieldworkers...I also began to realise that I could gain similarly...to improve my capacity to be a more effective facilitator in community development and fieldworker training and support. I would like this to happen while I still have the opportunity to make substantial social contributions through facilitating authentic changes within government departments, and while they are still struggling to bring about the idealistic social change promulgated in policy and programmes. Before too long the ideals of reconstruction, redistribution and development of the vulnerable poor may be abandoned in the face of pressures to conform to the global economy, which is unlikely to entertain a reversal of trends towards more power and wealth for the powerful and the wealthy. Meanwhile, there are many opportunities for significant learning by the majority of adults in this country, still in sight (Portfolio motivation: 3-4).

Using academic language, Deborah seamlessly links herself as a learner to her role as educator and agent of social change. She then connects herself to the national reconstructive project and links that to 'pressures to conform to the global economy'.

This ability to think in a complex way (and entertain ambiguities and provisionality) and to see the significance of seemingly small events, is also evident in her practitioner text where she moves systematically from macro to micro issues: from national and provincial government policy, to the strategic re-positioning of an NGO, to the design of an intervention, to a key moment of project implementation ('a moment of embarrassment during a planning meeting' (Portfolio text 1: 6). In that text, she proposes an intervention that engages with the complexity of the situation – the gap between espoused theory and theory in use and the need to secure changes involving senior personnel rather than put even more pressure and responsibility on field staff alone:

The resistance of field staff may well be rooted in valid concerns for the security of employment, and reflect their understanding of values that senior personnel actually hold, even while their new ideas are being handed out... (Portfolio text 1: 8).

She seems to be suggesting that initiating change at the level of the individual is a challenge that needs to be understood in terms of the power relations of the organisation: a thoroughly sociological and structuralist approach.

Problematizing orthodoxies

There are many other examples of Deborah moving beyond obvious conclusions and binarised positions towards complex, heterogeneous, unorthodox and counter-intuitive views and perspectives. She claims that resistance to change could be about concern not resistance:

Our experience is that...field-based staff are ordered to adopt changes which have been conceived and developed into plans by their superiors. It appears that they do not have the power of those who design and direct the change, and thus their resistance is often not respected as valid concern (Portfolio text 1: 5).

She also claims that drunks have often important contributions to make in meetings, 'The group decided that drunks are often bold enough to put across valid points that the sober are too shy to make in public, and therefore need to be listened to. A huge shift from removing these disturbers as the solution' (Portfolio text 1: 6). And that focusing on the strategies of the most resistant members of staff could provide the most useful insights, 'Further reflection on the resistance of the *most* resistant of trainees will assist us...' (Portfolio text 1: 8). Finally, that 'promoters of change' may themselves be unconsciously resisting change: 'There is perhaps, therefore, understandable cause for resistance to change being unconsciously sustained by the promoters of change themselves (Portfolio text 1: 8)'.

Self-awareness and multiple identities

Deborah constructs a sense of self that is almost postmodern in its attention to its social constructedness and multiple identity facets. As well as the obvious social and sociological

dimensions to her identity, Deborah deploys emotional and humanistic discourses of self-knowledge and personal development. In her own words, she is 'wedded to disclosure' – a phrase suggestive of a meta-level awareness of herself 'as text'.

However, her entry into RPL seemed to threaten an important aspect of her identity. Her wholesale rejection of 'a corrupt social system' led her to reject also the privileges of academia. She identified herself as an 'outsider'. In 1997, in a changed political context, she is able to reconsider her views about academia, but not without a 'crisis of identity' and some resistance. In a typically reflexive way, Deborah made an identity project out of her dilemma, which she recounted in her interviews and in her portfolio. She began by articulating advantages of her 'disadvantage' - for example, the accolades should she succeed as well as a ready-made excuse should she fail. Disadvantage was a comfortable place in some ways:

I had almost drawn from my disadvantage in a kind of contradictory way. Despite not having had adequate training I was doing lectures. Despite not having that support that I always identified the academic context as being... I was often thrown into situations without a background, and it kind of gave me an advantage in a way, because I could get away with not being up to standard on the one hand. On the other hand, I'd shine through. So, there was a pay-off in the disadvantage. So what worked was like 'wow'!!

She reported the strategies she deployed within the RPL process to further this identity project – first, becoming aware of 'how did I get here – to have this position', then trying out moving away from her outsider identity and returning to it, and finally discovering the possibility of being both an insider and outsider:

And then the first thing was to look at it – at my identities – was to be aware of it. That was the first thing that happened... Reflecting – moving – just moving – being willing to take a step away from my defensive, defended identity – self-identity...I found out that it was OK to leave my position and come back to it....

She says that she used the competence aspects of the RPL pedagogic process as a model of how to treat herself: ‘...it gave me a sense of “that’s how I ought to listen to myself”’. She acknowledges that it was the support of the group that made possible the ‘separation’ of her identities: ‘without the environment of the group it might have been too traumatic’. She speaks of ‘the relief of dropping those defence things’ and of RPL as ‘very empowering for me’. Within RPL, Deborah seems to have learnt how to hold complex, multifaceted, sometimes contradictory identity positions, and to take on new ones without relinquishing others – the truly postmodern self.

Recognising and realising the RPL gaze

Analysis suggests that Deborah was able to concentrate on her identity project because she already possessed the RPL recognition and realisation rules. As she says, ‘I was aware that I had enough background to draw on...I was completely convinced of its value’. Given her command of the recognition rules, she was able to exert control over her writing and representation of herself in her portfolio. She says that she was conscious of *whom* she was writing for, *how* she would write and *what* she would write: ‘I wrote for them’ – ‘I asked “what would they value”?’

She therefore writes with a clear sense of purpose, never losing sight of the overall thrust of the portfolio exercise – the construction of her candidature for the diploma, for academics. For example, she juxtaposes formal disciplinary education with her ‘independent path of learning’ suggesting that she would benefit from more of the former:

I believe that the course will broaden my understanding of the traditions and practices that I have not yet explored, and thus give my own insights a firmer basis of comparison with instinctively rejected approaches. In the process I would like to strengthen my grasp of why my approach works, and entertain any weaknesses that I am not aware of (Portfolio motivation: 1).

She weaves together a skilled engagement with Usher’s text, exploring the value of his framework for her own practice, moving comfortably between her experience and the text, referring to ‘my experience’, ‘my development work’, ‘my point of view’ – reflecting the authority she accords herself in her field. She takes issue with Usher on several valid counts: for example, that he does not make reference to experiences of adult education outside academic institutions, seeing this as a ‘lost opportunity’ to engage with ‘socially and economically disadvantaged adults, who have coped with excessive insecurity in their daily lives...’ (Portfolio text 2: 4).

She refers to her portfolio tasks as ‘translating’, suggesting that for her that was what RPL was about: ‘...it’s like translating - “this is what I think - I’m going to say it like this so that they can hear that I can talk their language too”’. I would argue that not much translation was required in her case.

Discussion

Bernstein's concepts suggest that Deborah's informal learning bore the hallmarks of a formal education. She engaged with strongly classified texts that were firmly located in their respective disciplinary structures. In fact, the texts that Deborah engaged with were far more theoretical than the more weakly classified texts deployed in RPL. I would argue that Deborah acquired vertical discourse and analytical ability largely through her political and intellectual home life, but also through achievement within formal secondary education. These discourses had developed throughout her adult life as an educator/ practitioner and political activist. These abilities and experiences resonated with the gaze of RPL in many ways. Deborah was *already* a confident participant in the academic community – embodying the RPL gaze (and more). The RPL process simply confirmed that for her. As she says: 'I'm already in...It was a fit for me. I didn't have to crack it...The RPL process probably helped me to understand that'.

I would also argue that Deborah possessed the RPL recognition and realisation rules at a far higher level than required. This meant that (after she recognised she was 'already in') she did not have to spend time recognising and realising, or translating. Instead she could use the time to create a postmodern identity project for herself. She developed a meta-level awareness of this process, which she was confident enough to include in her portfolio - in ways that extended the realisation rules of the RPL process. This awareness allowed her to see that she was 'translating' her knowledge into a particular academic language. The crucial issue here is that translation requires a high level of competence and fluency in the recognition and realisation rules – thus confirming a fundamental paradox of RPL – you have to be already in before you are!

Freda - prior experiential knowledge and the RPL gaze: 'in search of "balance"'

The analytical themes pertaining to Freda show that the gaze we wanted the RPL candidates to recognise and realise was at a great distance, and divergent from, her prior experiential knowledge and associated identities.

Distances and divergences from the gaze

A corporate professional

Freda presents herself, first and foremost, as a corporate professional. Data suggest four phases in her working life. First, in an HRD capacity; secondly, in managerial positions in Public Relations and HRD; thirdly, running her own Public Relations consultancy; fourthly, relocating to another city and assuming a lecturer position at a private tertiary college.

Running a consultancy appears to have been highly significant for her. She speaks of the great strides she made personally ('a period of extreme growth', 'an ego boost'). It is clear that she enjoyed quite a powerful location and identity position as a corporate professional until the mid-nineties. In her words, 'I was very knowledgeable and very capable in my comfortable environment'.

The most important social context for Freda seems to have been the corporate/ multinational world. As discussed in the Introduction, during the late seventies and eighties the private

sector in South Africa initiated and resourced reform processes designed to deracialise workplaces. This is what Freda was involved in when she was a manager in Public Relations:

This was a period of extreme dedication and exhaustion for me as it involved the integration of all employee benefits and facilities at a time when there was extreme opposition to this, but I was under pressure from the head office in America, whose attitude was that they would close the whole SA operation down, rather than suffer any embarrassment from its practices and procedures (Portfolio motivation : 3).

She faced opposition, not only from critical theorists on the left, but from conservative industrialists on the right. Yet her involvement in these reforms surfaces the tacit ideology system of the RPL process. In the light of previous analysis of the RPL gaze, the resources recontextualised and so on - it became clear that our sense of the importance of history and social context was derived from a critical sociological view of the world, not that of business and monopoly capital. The nature of Freda's work is therefore revealing about the RPL gaze. I would argue that our gaze was aligned to those who criticised such reforms, in the ways outlined in the Introduction. We might, for example, have taken a political economy view of industrial relations. This suggests an ideological or political dissonance between the gaze of RPL and the nature of Freda's prior experiential learning, with power in this instance, located with the former.

A changing educator role

A thread of educator work runs throughout Freda's professional life, from early workplace literacy programmes to her part-time work at the private tertiary college, which she terms 'undergraduate' level:

My initial educational experience, however, came through adult literacy training for my first employer some twenty years ago. This knowledge later enabled me to successfully introduce community literacy projects, as part of the company's social responsibility programme, and to assist with training at the Community Centre. This broad spectrum of experience, from human resources to illiterate and undergraduate education, provides me with a fairly extensive understanding... (Portfolio motivation: 1).

However, educator work was clearly secondary to her corporate responsibilities. It is pertinent to compare Freda's experience as an educator/trainer with what was transmitted via the RPL gaze. Freda refers to her stance towards education as 'behaviourist' (although maybe this was shifting). In using the ETDP Quality Framework, we regarded the educator as operating in a range of contexts, including the workplace and formal institutions. However, the role of the educator in the Fotheringham *et al.* text was constructivist-radical, non-formal and community-based, operating from a university base. This was a long way from Freda's experience.

Freda's relocation to another city in 1997 seems to have been a watershed for her. She says that, before the move, she was teaching 'affluent' students. She speaks of them rather nostalgically:

...my students then were mainly from private schools – not only affluent families – and of a similar standard whether they were male or female. And even in the different age groups. When I came down here, the gap was much bigger and the starting block was moved much further back but the education time wasn't increased.

She was subsequently faced with the challenges of a diverse (predominantly black) student profile and changed socio-political conditions. She articulates this through the term 'gap' – the gap between her own experience and that of the students; between the general education level she was used to her students having and the level that students who had been the recipients of poor quality formal education entered with; between middle class and working class in terms of awareness of the world of business: 'how to bridge the gap, or achieve balance, where what I have previously perceived as basic life skills and business awareness are not part of a student's experience' (Portfolio motivation :1). She admits that she does not know what to do. None of her previous educator/trainer strategies seem to work.

Engaging with a changed social context

In a different city, Freda is facing a number of dilemmas. She sees herself as confident in her subject knowledge, but wanting to locate herself within the broader context of the 'new' South Africa and to gain exposure to fresh and more appropriate frames for her professional needs:

Whilst completely secure with the continually updating knowledge regarding the subjects that I lecture, I believe, I need further education, guidance and direction with regard to changing educational situations and methods plus sociological and economic changes in society, where it

is impossible for me to gain a true perspective, in isolation, from a very diverse but specific 'sample'¹⁷⁰ (Portfolio motivation : 1).

Freda presents herself as in search of a new community in new times. Data suggest she had been a loner, 'I've tended to be a loner. As a lecturer you are a loner. You're up there alone – you're not part of the group'. The feelings of isolation do not seem to have been mitigated by her ongoing consultancy work. As an 'independent contractor – I've got to do the job, look for the next job, wrap up the last job'.

In moving from the corporate world into the stormy uncertain waters of academia, a recurring theme in Freda's portfolio is her search for 'balance' and 'equilibrium':

Hopefully enabling me to better cope with the moral, ethical and professional conflicts which I am experiencing and assist me in integrating "contradiction and ambiguity" in order to achieve **BALANCE and EQUILIBRIUM** [original emphasis] (Portfolio text 2: 5).

She recruits Usher in her quest for balance, suggesting that it is required at several levels – between theory and practice and between active and passive learning: '...he is advocating *balance*. A balance as being relevant and optimal in respect of theory and practice, active and passive learning and acknowledging the coexistence of and seeking to integrate seeming opposites' [my emphasis] (Portfolio text 2: 3).

I would argue that Freda was motivated by a perceived need to remodel her identity in the 'new' South Africa – to shift her own knowledge to something more contemporary. The above

¹⁷⁰ Does the apprehension suggested by the 'scare quotes' suggest that she is trying out academic language, rather uncomfortably?

analysis also suggests a very real felt need for a 'community' and support. There is evidence that the therapeutic aspects of RPL provided that support. In her portfolio, she makes an informal plea to the (unknown) assessors not to take away her new-found community: 'Please having found this resource I do not wish to lose it'.

Recognising and realising the RPL gaze

Freda undertook further/higher education during the seventies and was 'in possession of a three-year public relations and communication diploma' (Portfolio text 1:1). There is no suggestion of her having been involved in any non-formal, continuing professional education. I would argue that a learner role was relatively new and uncomfortable for her. As she says, 'I was perhaps more used to being in a position of power. I was "the lecturer" and to now become "the student" – having not been a student for some 10-12 years at least'.

Recognising different gazes

RPL was a very different environment from anything Freda had previously experienced: 'working in a very business-orientated area and this being an academic area...' In the requirement to recognise the RPL gaze, she had very few hooks from her own prior experiential knowledge. Data suggest that Freda did not fully possess the RPL recognition rules at the time of assessment. For example, in the following quotation from her portfolio, is she referring to learners, or to educators as learners?: 'I also believe that I could bring to the diploma group, a much needed perspective that not *all* adult learners are necessarily needy or from disadvantaged backgrounds – an assumption clearly evident among RPL candidates'

(Portfolio motivation: 2). As well as asserting the value of her own position, she seems to be suggesting that other RPL candidates had a view of the majority of adult learners as 'needy' and 'disadvantaged'¹⁷¹:

By the time of her first interview, she was, however, more aware of differences between gazes, and able to talk in a very reflexive way about her particular reading practices (of the information-gathering and synthesising type) that necessitate a critical, 'market' eye and a sense of audience:

I am working in such a fast changing environment, I have to read, and because knowledge is power, in a market and communication environment, I have to know what is going on out there in terms of business practices, what's going on, who's a good touch for social investment...trying to pick up trends...always trying to target the market – 'who wrote this, who was it written for, why was it written, did it miss/achieve the objective?' (First interview).

Bernstein's theories suggest that during RPL Freda was aware that the recognition rules had changed - but perhaps she did not know what they had become? There is evidence that she developed some strategies for 'plotting' the recognition rules. In her first interview, she reported that she had listened for 'throw-away phrases that obviously had far deeper meaning that I did not understand at that stage – or a history attached to them in an environment to which I did not particularly relate'. However, by the time of her second interview three years later, she recognises very clearly the difference between forms of knowledge – the knowledge valued in the corporate world and the knowledge valued at RPL assessment. She sees the latter as being 'personal' and 'intellectual': 'Coming from the corporate environment, valuable

¹⁷¹ Compare, for example, Deborah's sturdy notion of 'the poor'.

knowledge produces capital, growth or wealth, analytical information. Whereas the knowledge valued in RPL was a personal intellectual kind of knowledge’.

Realising the signals – trying out the gaze

Freda’s portfolio affords a strong sense of her trying to realise the RPL gaze and failing. The result is the mobilisation of a range of discourses and associated textual strategies – part-corporate, part-therapeutic, part-narrative – but in a very unsettled way.

The use of scare ‘quotes’ and **bold** are examples of an unconscious uncertainty. Freda places words from different discourses in quotation marks or in bold, as if signalling their lack of fit. For example, on the first page of her first text **adult educator**, **balance**, **other** and **value** are emboldened. Other examples are the quotation marks around ‘ideas’, ‘bounce off’ and ‘economic’ in one paragraph. She is clearly troubled by the word and concept of ‘social’ since it consistently appears in the same way. The result of these recurrent markings is a sense that Freda is borrowing terms and is unsure about how to use them.

At times, there is an informal conversational style, as in ‘[e]nough personal theorising, on to Usher’s further balancing acts of “co-existence of seeming opposites” for integration, for a more “coherent and sophisticated consciousness about learning”’. And there is a mixture of direct conversational style and that of a business letter in the final sentence of her motivation: ‘It is now over to you to decide whether or not I have met the entry requirements...I sincerely hope so and look forward to hearing from you’ (Portfolio motivation: 3).

It is obvious that Fotheringham *et al.* and Freda inhabit very different educator identities and contexts. Not surprisingly therefore, Freda's initial attempt to write in Fotheringham's style quickly falls away. She creates a set of 'issues' which are somewhat separate from the problems she has outlined, and follows this with a list of 'learnings', ending with a sort of mantra (to help her cope?) in bold and capitals, and as a separate paragraph:

THAT I SHOULD NOT BECOME TOO DESPONDENT, TOO EASILY, AND THAT I SHOULD DRAW ON AND TRUST MY LEARNINGS AS AN ADULT EDUCATION PRACTITIONER TO HELP OTHERS COPE, AND TO COPE MYSELF [original emphasis] (Portfolio text 1: 5).

In her second interview, she referred to trying to find a 'mid-way' position in her portfolio, between the academic and the corporate and 'hedging her bets and hoping for the best': 'I was aware of it at the time - not knowing where to pitch it [i.e. her text]. Wanting to perhaps simplify it so I was comfortable with it - but feeling I needed perhaps to make it a little more eloquent and articulate to gain access'. With the benefit of hindsight, Freda compares textual strategies in the corporate world to those in the RPL world. In the following, she describes the gulf between Public Relations writing strategies ('KISS') and academic ones:

...in terms of my profession, I write for an audience and I write to establish understanding. So, to start writing couched in academic phrases was very foreign for me. I'm much happier writing a general - or a catch phrase for an advertisement that I believe will stick and so on. And it's your real KISS - keep it short and sweet or keep it simple. And here was somebody looking for expansion, almost looking at confusing language, complicating it for a third party, whereas I spend my life trying to simplify it and get to the message. If I write a media release - you're training the students to write in an inverted pyramid - the most important thing must be

said in the first paragraph...Now you're turning it totally around where you've got to start it off and develop an argument and explore it...I have a conflict as to why it must be academically complicated when the message is the same...

The phrase 'foreign' expresses an ongoing sense of unfamiliarity. Her understanding of academic writing is that it is 'expansive', concerned with developing an argument, but perhaps deliberately obfuscatory.

On several occasions, she laments the lack of a strong framing in RPL. She wanted things to be spelled out. First, the regulative discourse (that is, modes of conduct): 'I was in conflict about whether to take a leadership role or stop and listen...There was conflict about whether I needed to assert myself to gain access, be visible and appear knowledgeable or whether to listen – which I am trained to do – and perhaps gain something from it'. This quotation speaks partly to differential modes of realisation in corporate and academic settings, and partly to the invisible RPL pedagogy. Secondly, the evaluative rules: 'Where was the standard going to be? I didn't know where the standard was, and I didn't know how to use it, how academic to write, in response to the academic text. [The criteria] said what you wanted but they didn't say at what level you wanted it'.

I would claim that without control of either the recognition or realisation rules of this particular context, it was very difficult for Freda to present an account of herself and her prior experiential knowledge in the terms of the RPL gaze. Since she has only partial recognition of the gaze's rules, the realisation principles are not fully available to her.

The value of competence

In spite of all the above dissonances and difficulties, Freda found and honed a set of coping strategies within the RPL process. How did she do this? The therapeutic elements of the competence pedagogy seem to have held her. She stresses the supportive nature of the 'initial contact' and 'interaction' during the orientation day as important in enabling her to stay with the process. Given her own educator background as a 'self-confessed behaviourist', it is likely that the therapeutic elements of the RPL process, although welcome, were also new to her. Thus: 'I think a lot of similarities between individuals but very different coping mechanisms of introverting and extroverting'. However, she quickly recognised and embraced the 'disclosure' requirement of the RPL process, which she generalised as being characteristic of all RPL:

This, for me, is the essence of the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) process, in that it is reflexive learning, for both parties, based on absolute trust, both parties exposing and acknowledging frailties and mutually valuing their own and others' areas of expertise (Portfolio text 2: 2).

There are some data that suggest that the RPL group performed two functions for Freda - first, of providing her with therapeutic support whilst undergoing RPL; secondly, of fulfilling her longstanding need for a community to reduce her experience of isolation. She puts the two aspects together in the following quote:

The realisation that there are other educators out there, who genuinely do care and wish to understand and address similar concern to my own, was in the words of a fellow RPL student better than a therapy session' (Portfolio motivation: 2).

Discussion

As noted, key themes in terms of Freda's knowledge and identities and the gaze of RPL are distance and divergence from this particular gaze and some aspects its pedagogy. I would claim that Freda attempted to recontextualise (or translate) corporate/ management knowledge into the RPL gaze.

Although she could see some of the differences and was aware that 'success' depended on her being able to recognise and realise appropriately, she did not arrive at a situation where she could do so in the time allowed. The analysis shows that she partially acquired the recognition rules. This came through more strongly in the interview data¹⁷² but less clearly in the portfolio data because, there, she was struggling with the realisation rules as well.

I would claim that Freda (like Vusi) had great difficulty with an RPL process that is conceptualised and operationalised as a one-way bridge. She had a long way to travel, much new learning to achieve, 'access to greater knowledge', as she puts it. It is interesting to revisit Freda's own notion of the 'gap', and to speculate as to whether RPL was subjecting her to exactly the same experience as that to which she subjected her new, black students. At the private college where she worked, Freda had a gaze that she wanted her students to acquire but which she found they could not. The process of RPL mirrors that. Like her students, she doesn't fully know what she doesn't know. This is also reminiscent of the apprentice mode of junior staff in the department more generally, of the discomfort experienced at being 'half in and half out'.

¹⁷² Undertaken at a later date, and so drawing on the benefit of hindsight and the experience of the diploma.

There is obviously a role for competence pedagogy in supporting learners/RPL candidates through zones of discomfort. The issue involves the balance of competence and performance pedagogies and strong and weak framing. As mentioned in connection with Vusi, for candidates with prior experiential knowledge at a distance from a particular gaze (i.e. who need to acquire the recognition and realisation rules – new learning), either the RPL pedagogy or the receiving curricula (or both) have to change. In the case of Freda and Vusi, RPL needed to RPL itself – to recognise the specificity of its own gaze!

Marie - prior experiential knowledge and the RPL gaze: 'making a Marie that I like to be'

The central themes of the RPL process, in relation to Marie are 'congruence' and 'growth', with resources put to work in very particular ways.

Resources in congruence with the RPL gaze

A reflective and analytical corporate professional

After 'working in a bank straight from school', Marie was employed in the corporate world for fifteen years. A picture emerges from the data of an independent, proactive, resourceful and accomplished professional working in a highly task-orientated way across a range of research and development tasks in HRD and Organisational Development (OD), although evidence suggests that by the time of RPL, this was no longer a primary or strong identity for her (she uses the past tense in the quotation below). As she says: 'I had a strong sense of myself in my context at work - in the corporate world and what I had achieved there with oftentimes not many resources when I looked at who I was competing against'.

In her practitioner text, Marie analyses an OD research and development intervention in a recruitment agency that 'failed'. She clearly *identifies systemic problems* in a dysfunctional company - for example, 'there was no clear division of responsibility between the managers...individuals were held accountable for poor performance yet they felt many of the problems within the company were to do with ineffective management...a climate of internal

competition rather than cooperation' (Portfolio text 1:3). She offers *explanatory analyses*, as in:

...the style of management was authoritarian and did not engender open discussion or proactive thinking...The punitive management style adopted by Mr [...] during this difficult phase was the cause of stress felt by individuals. This stress seemed to perpetuate the cycle of poor performance yet they felt ill equipped to improve their performance. They felt unsupported by management and in fact felt many of the problems within the company were due to ineffective management (Portfolio text 1: 3-4).

She then outlines the *strategic change intervention that she planned and facilitated*: 'Goals were set, accountability was established for the different tasks and desired times by when certain goals should be achieved were programmed' (Portfolio text 1:7). Finally, she *evaluates* the overall intervention and the reasons for its 'failure':

However all the comfort and satisfaction we were feeling about our hard won achievements was purely superficial...when it came to making decisions about the important issues...nothing had changed. In the end it was the core of the organisation that needed changing (Portfolio text 1:10).

What is striking about her evaluations is the self-critical nature of her approach. She used her practitioner text (as the RPL gaze required) to create a critical distance on her practice. For example: '...more time and deliberation should have been given to the preparation phase, the stress and discomfort I saved myself in the short term by not dealing with the "hard" issues upfront became a source of conflict within my role throughout the process' (Portfolio text 1:9). Interestingly, her first text ends with a set of questions rather than a set of conclusions, signalling, perhaps, a reluctance to go for closure on a complex set of issues.

Her research and development work aligned with the RPL gaze in significant ways. It involved seeing how context shapes choices and assumptions, posing and solving problems, seeing relationship between ideal and reality, questioning, and so forth. In terms of the reading and writing aspects of the RPL gaze (make connections and develop arguments, compare and contrast texts with own learning from experience, analyse and evaluate, etc.), Marie is clearly able to realise the RPL gaze, using the corporate world as context, rather than the more community-orientated world of the Fotheringham *et al.* text.

A 'humanistic corporate' facilitator

Marie recalls that she had 'always created a training and facilitation "space" in my positions in the past'. Her use of 'training' and 'facilitation' suggests that she is drawing from two traditions. Although she writes about 'providing management and staff with training' (Portfolio text 1:8), when it comes to evaluating the initiative, Marie is very clear that 'everyone was consolidating their learning' (Portfolio text 1:8). I would claim that in her OD capacity Marie was a 'humanistic corporate facilitator'. This resonates with the competence pedagogy of the RPL process.

Resources from formal education

Marie left formal schooling after her 'O' levels. There is evidence indicating powerfully negative experiences of schooling. She refers to the 'woundedness' that goes on in schools 'around what makes you a good learner and not a good learner...And the kind of stuff we end up living with as a result'. She does however, recognise the resources, social value and capital

that accrue from formal education: 'I really have found myself saying, 'gosh Marie, if you didn't have that level of formal education and that particular type of formal education you would not have made it'. She particularly highlights the significance of formal literacy/textual practices, which she links to 'essayist experience' and an 'identity as a writer established early in life'. She goes on to distinguish between content and form, proposing that schooling provided her with 'fundamental literacies', whereas 'life experience has helped me with content not necessarily form'.

The textual and literacy practices of Marie's formal education come through strongly in her portfolio. There is an essay-like quality to her texts. In her practitioner text, for example: 'A brief history of [the company] and a description of some of the emerging issues within the company provide the context in which the "Process of Change" began' (Portfolio text 1: 1). She is also able to create an almost literary sense of drama and anticipation in the reader, as in the following: 'The process was fraught with negativity and skepticism. Consultants doomed the process to failure before it has begun...' (Portfolio text 1: 5).

The above analysis suggests that Marie entered RPL with a vertical discourse (the distinction between 'form' and 'content', the grounding in 'fundamental literacies', 'an identity as a writer') and a sophisticated meta-awareness of her own abilities – including an awareness that she would not have succeeded in RPL without resources from formal education, especially, in terms of the textual demands of the RPL process.

Resources from non-formal education: engagement with classical texts

Marie presents herself as a self-educated person. Like Deborah she has a reading past:

I've kind of read books, Jung and a lot of other non fiction -- reading has been a big part of my life...about going to the library...about the human mind and a bit of philosophy...dabbled...always read...interest has come from me...a desire to know more...no one particular person who has influenced me...always wanted to study (First interview).

Evidence suggests an important set of resources from non-formal education in a School of Practical Philosophy and from classical philosophical texts and vertical discourses she encountered in that environment ('all kinds of disciplines'):

I have been a member of the School of Practical Philosophy for 5 years...based very much on the Socratic, dialogic stuff ...we have lectures...what the students bring makes the lecture the lecture - so it's not a rigid set of course material - it's also the kind of questions that students ask that make the teaching... It is very much grounded in Hinduism and that kind of stuff ...it enables you to read and process all kinds of disciplines... quite an intensive learning space. There are no exams...all self-directed. It can kind of nourish you and get you motivated to read...It is just yourself. There is no one telling you how much you must give and how much you mustn't and that's opened up wonderful spaces for me...that's facilitated learning...Philosophy means a love of wisdom (First interview).

Marie has obviously had a lot of exposure to strongly classified knowledge structures, their abstract qualities and deep structures. A mixture of lectures, participation and mentorship/guidance suggests a particular mix of performance and competence modes and strong and weak framing not dissimilar to that deployed within RPL. This echoes evidence (discussed below) that Marie responded favourably to the RPL pedagogy: there were continuities with her non-formal education as well as with the style that she adopted as a facilitator.

RPL as therapy

Data suggest that humanistic introspection is an important basis for action in Marie's life. She opens her portfolio with a telling example of how she constructs herself principally as concerned with her own individual development:

After 15 years of experience gained in the Corporate world, I made the decision to stay at home after the birth of my second child, where I have been for the last two years. This has been a time of personal reflection and consolidation as well as a process of coming to grips with what it is that I want for myself and then acting upon it, despite the obstacles (Portfolio motivation:1).

There is much evidence in the portfolio and interview data that attests to her ability to deploy this capacity to good effect within RPL. For example, she responded naturally and effortlessly to keeping a personal journal, using it as a broker for reflection and learning: '... use of personal journals and reflection enabled me to go into that space on my own...' Her writing practices are also introspective and exploratory, as in: 'This led me to explore further and I connected more deeply with one of the underlying causes...' (Portfolio text 2: 4).

Data suggest that introspection took on a psychotherapeutic dimension for Marie. The negative effect of formal education is supported by advice she received to use further study as resource for healing: 'the healing was never going to happen in my head...I had to go through the process of studying'. In this way, RPL became part of a personal project for Marie, a way of overcoming 'past experiences and relationships and how this influences self construction'.

RPL was, then, a highly charged process for Marie on various levels. Data bear out her confidence in her professional identity alongside her insecurity as a learner in a formal education context. The strong, corporate Marie comes through in, 'When I came into the RPL...I had a strong sense of myself in my context at work – in the corporate world'. The more insecure Marie speaks a language of self-doubt:

I came in as what I imagine may have looked – I don't know the word – but when you see people who are evidently competent and yet they speak in a language of self-doubt – constantly. I find that can be quite irritating and frustrating. I came in as that kind of candidate.

During the RPL process, confidence and excitement co-existed with anxiety and self-doubt – in 'high speed internal dialogue': 'I experienced a huge tension ...in one aspect of agency feeling very strong and empowered and in another feeling insecure, anxious...where this high-speed internal dialogue would be going on'. There was seldom a moment when she could relax and feel confident. As a result, she cleaved closely to the therapeutic elements of the competence pedagogy. First, she was in no doubt that the RPL process was 'experiential' and reflective, and this clearly suited her: 'By examining my particular experience and developing the critical analysis of the experience and learning, I was able to connect with the experience in new and different ways which in itself has become a source of new learning and further exploration' (Portfolio text 2: 4). Secondly, data indicate how she also put the peer reference groupings to work with good effect in her personal project. She says that she 'felt very competent in terms of the peer group that I found myself in'. She responded readily to the social elements of the RPL pedagogy by learning with and from others. She says: 'Discussion has always been an important component of my learning process...I have always enjoyed a balance between group activity and involvement and working individually' (Portfolio text 2:

5). Thirdly, she had no problem with the requirement to disclose, 'giving you, who had all the power, that's how I perceived it, a sense of me, a sense of, this was where I was coming from – this was my journey and this was some of my thinking'.

The personal project was thus successful. She said, 'I can say the RPL certainly created an awareness of stuff...I moved through an enormous amount of inner stuff – inner woundedness – in that space'. She came to see, 'how I have unwittingly played a part in my own sense of being under-valued. Because I kept feeling "the under-valuedness is out there" until I came into RPL and I said, "Marie, you are also under-valuing your experience", participating in my own oppression'. She found ways to retell and rewrite the stories she had told herself about herself:

...redescribing those experiences in my life...it has changed how I see myself...we are all story-telling people and since the RPL...talking about something negative...we relooked at it and at the end retelling it...making it build you up and not break you down (First interview).

Thus, for Marie, RPL was a process of remaking herself. She refers to a process of 'deconstruction and re-construction' (Portfolio text 2: 4) and surmises, 'it's making a Marie – that I like – that I like to be'.

The above analysis suggests that Marie's presence in the RPL group, and her need for support to face personal challenges, had the effect of 'psychologising' the RPL process as a whole. I would claim that she was another candidate who exploited the gaps between transmission and acquisition, therefore taking control of aspects of the competence pedagogy in order to meet her own needs. Moreover, she could not have embraced an RPL process that did not have competence pedagogy.

The main area of distance, and possible dissonance with, the RPL gaze was Marie's emphasis of the personal over the sociological. Her reflection is in psychological terms, not in the sociological terms of the RPL gaze. Although she can realise the RPL requirements of problem-posing, being self-critical, critical enquiry, questioning, problematisation and lack of closure, she does not do this in the terms set out in the RPL assessment criteria. She does, however, make reference to a storied approach to the self, which is consonant with the RPL gaze.

Learning, learning, learning

Evidence suggests that the combination of resources from formal and non-formal education, and the corporate environment equipped Marie with a well-developed learner identity. I would argue that Marie was a 'natural' learner, deprived of opportunities in the formal sector because of powerfully negative experiences within it.

She describes her corporate experience in learning terms, as in, 'In my career when I have recognised a lack in knowledge or experience I have used different resources to fill the gaps. These resources have been books, people, journals, other organisations and training courses' (Portfolio text 2:5). She *likes* learning: 'When I have been in "classroom situations" being either work related or out of my personal interests there has always been a desire to be there and learn' (Portfolio text 2: 5). She sees everything as having a learning dimension to it: 'By creating an experience in one area of my life I have used the learning to assist me in another and in this respect I see learning as a continuum... an endless process' (Portfolio text 2: 5).

There is evidence to suggest that the Usher text extended Marie's understanding of her own learning and of herself and gave her a learner identity in a very powerful way. The following quote from her portfolio (Text 2: 5) illustrates this: 'Examination and reflection of our experiences facilitated the use of the deep approach to using experience'. Using Usher, she reviewed and re-evaluated herself and found a powerful new identity position, which went some way to overcoming the pain that she had previously associated with formal education. The importance of Usher is signified in the following quotation: 'The other issue that came up for me was how I had undervalued my experience and working with that particular text was hugely empowering and has had a knock-on effect in terms of who I am in my world'.

Like Deborah, Marie has developed a *meta-level awareness* of herself as a learner, not only can she talk very fluently about her learning, but she is able to reflect-in-action, as in looking at 'the ideas I have about myself as a learner and therefore how I act and react in learning situations'. She is also able to locate her learning needs within broader 'frameworks' and 'bodies of knowledge':

I had a sense that there were gaps in my framework...a whole body of knowledge yet to be explored...felt I'd need the structure of attending formal lectures...I also wanted involvement in an interactive learning environment...I want to develop a theoretical framework of educational practice (Portfolio motivation: 1).

Her facility with academic writing is particularly evident in her Usher text. Her methodical and thorough summary leave the reader in no doubt of her grasp of his arguments and of her own meta-language for dealing with theory. She does this by moving through the paper section by section or paragraph by paragraph, rather than by way of an overview. She then links Usher's arguments to her experience of the RPL process. Finally, she successfully

develops a theory of herself as a learner, making very powerful connections between her experience of the RPL process, herself as a learner and Usher's text. The result is a remarkably coherent text.

Discussion

Analysis has already shown how Deborah shaped the transmission-acquisition 'gap' by constructing the RPL process as a testing ground for her identity-crisis and mixed feelings around the privileges of academia; and how, for Freda, RPL was about finding a new community and a new identity in a changed social context. Marie, in turn, seems to have used the RPL space to undertake personal work on her painful experiences of and around formal education. She took up the identity of RPL candidate in a very particular way, and, I would argue, shaped the RPL process at the same time.

In order to take such an active role in shaping RPL to meet her own needs, the above analysis shows that Marie was already in possession of the RPL recognition rules, certainly enough to enable her to pick up our signals. Her proximity to both recognition and realisation rules comes through clearly in her comment that '*within hours* we started using the language...I quickly found – when I became an RPL candidate that there was a way of articulating your experience' [my emphasis].

Where there is less congruence between Marie's prior experiential knowledge and the gaze of the RPL horizontal knowledge structure is in the area of location – historically and sociologically. Her location is primarily a psychological one. She lives in the world of the subjective self. Although she has a meta-level ability to see herself as a learner and

practitioner, she does not have the same ability to distance herself from humanism and subjectivism. This tends to foreground an intentional, agentful rather than the more provisional and discursive 'self as text' coded into the RPL gaze. The RPL process gave her the confidence to use the knowledge she already had. In her case, therefore, RPL was about the same (or similar enough) knowledge, although gained in contexts other than formal education. She was able to translate (or recontextualise) her prior experiential knowledge within the terms of the RPL gaze.

Oscar - prior experiential learning and the RPL gaze: 'exposure'

There is much congruence between Oscar's prior experiential knowledge and the RPL gaze. Oscar can be seen as an 'ideal-type' of RPL candidate in this particular context. Continuity and contiguity are central themes. Social location comes powerfully to the fore.

Resources in continuity with the RPL gaze

Fusion of work and the political

Data show that Oscar's working life has always been linked to the political. Armed 'with a technical certificate' (Portfolio text 2: 8), he moved from shop floor work in industry to (senior) trade union shop stewardship, to becoming an 'ABET practitioner in industry' with increasing management responsibilities for the company's ABET programme, which led to the position of regional ABET co-ordinator for the company. His early shop steward days were concerned with political activism and worker support and advocacy. For example, he speaks of 'rallying support', 'campaigning', 'a process of people/worker development' and 'social responsibility/obligation'. Oscar represents himself as a union official who was easy to relate to, a balanced and skilled negotiator (not an unyielding 'hot head') with a strong strategic voice.

It is pertinent to note Oscar's continuity of purpose as he rose through the ranks of industry and on to the NGO. This continuity was sustained by his concern with worker interests, a 'keen interest in the development of ordinary working people' (Portfolio text 2: 8). However, significant changes in role are implied by the above career moves. As he says, he was

participating in ABET debates and programmes 'at a different level'. Instead of 'rallying support' for ABET as a trade union activist, he was marketing and selling ABET provision to company managers, and assisting and advising them on setting up their programmes.

Oscar's career embodies a powerful theme of accomplishment. Although both his RPL texts illustrate this, it is most evident in his self as practitioner text. It has a relaxed style and an engaging narrative form, as in: 'My first recollection of ABET being considered within [the company] was a telephone call during the first half of 1990 from a shop steward...At this meeting which I recall rather vividly... '(Portfolio text 1: 2). There is also a frequent and confident use of colloquialisms – 'about ten shop stewards', 'a handful of companies'. Oscar indicates his presence, authority and confidence in his field and in debates by frequent use of the first person: 'I believe that...', 'My own view on this...', 'I have found...', 'My concern for this is that...', 'This approach I feel would...'

The above analysis indicates a strongly-stated political identity operationalised throughout his working life – an identity characterised by an oppositional and critical approach and a commitment to struggles for worker rights. Oscar clearly locates himself within the socio-political strategy of political struggle, and this resonates with the sociological approach of RPL. As with Deborah, an active commitment to social and political transformation is a driving force for Oscar. There are clear resonances with those features of the RPL gaze reflected in the criterion: 'The ability to reflect critically on own practice including seeing/locating it within its larger historical and social context'.

'Exposure' and the value of informal learning

A central theme in Oscar's texts (both oral and written) is 'exposure'¹⁷³. This links to the extremely high value he affords to his informal learning and prior experiential knowledge: 'I regard my learning during my last fifteen years outside of the school environment as part of my most valuable contribution to education' (Portfolio text 2:8). He refers to 'exposures' to influential political activists as a source of great pride and confidence, 'I had lots of *exposure* in life with very interesting people. Many of them well-achieved academics like the Neville Alexanders¹⁷⁴ of the world'. He also refers to the exposure he was afforded into the wider trade union movement as a shop steward. He talks about 'being able to serve on various national structures and going to meetings with people who were supposedly high powered in the business world or other political people and so forth'. He also refers to 'going to court cases' and gaining 'exposure to how the world works in the legal field – having to deal with labour issues and labour laws'.

In a statement of loyalty and allegiance to informal learning and collective endeavour, Oscar stresses that it was his involvement in the trade union movement at the level of the rank and file, rather than his own personal achievements, that 'provided the opportunity' for the new job with the NGO. Given the centrality of informal learning in his life and work, Oscar welcomed the opportunities for reflection presented by the RPL pedagogy:

The RPL process – what I liked about it most was that it allowed me an opportunity to reflect and to say to myself – even though I knew it – I've always had a decent sense of who I am and what qualities I have – but it helped me to think about that a bit more – which perhaps I would

¹⁷³ It encompasses positive and negative 'exposures', but more frequently the former.

¹⁷⁴ Ex-Robben Island prisoner.

never have done had that opportunity not come up – that was great. And then being able to see how that helped me to gain access...

Although there is a therapeutic quality in the above quotation, I would argue that Oscar's overall conceptualisation of the RPL process is more in line with Bernstein's populist or radical mode of competence. He sees the RPL concept in political terms as a necessary way of recognising the informal learning of historically disadvantaged South Africans (including himself).

The centrality of textual practices

An important feature of continuity in Oscar's working life is the centrality of literacy and textual practices. This began when he was a shop steward. He read widely in industrial relations and labour law. He had to 'deal with difficult papers and legislation' and spent a lot of time 'reading for information... at levels far more advanced than what I dealt with at school'. He also produced documents himself, including 'putting together pamphlets for the civic movements' and writing 'many little articles around the struggles we were having'. It is clear that Oscar's textual practices (particularly his reading practices¹⁷⁵) involved engagement with vertical discourses. He came to feel particularly confident in his writing abilities, and claims he was able to transfer them to RPL:

All the way through the course in fact – that, for me was – from my history – because I had that writing experience – even though it was in different contexts – but I could draw on that because that was an experience I had. So, I felt that that helped. It made the RPL process a little easier for me in that I could write about whatever...

¹⁷⁵ But see analysis below regarding Oscar's negative sense of himself as a reader.

There is evidence to suggest that Oscar's very considerable literacy and textual experience *did* bridge easily into the textual realisation requirements of the RPL gaze. For example, he is able to 'contrast and compare texts with own learning from experience', as evidenced by the way in which he links his own practitioner text directly to the Fotheringham *et al.* text by drawing out similarities and differences. He then enters a disclaimer (a device from the legal world?) concerning the critiques he is about to make of his previous company's ABET programmes. He proceeds to set out with clarity what his text will do:

My observations are intended to focus on areas where more grassroots participation as well as strong maintenance or control over the implementation of the process on the part of the trade unions could perhaps have ensured that the direction of the ABET programme could have been more geared to the original objectives within the guidelines (Portfolio text 1: 1).

Texts and groups

As analysis has already shown, there is clearly a social dimension to Oscar's political life and work. The social and the textual are closely entwined. He refers to the mixture of 'texts and groups' in the following:

For about two or three weeks of the year over this period [i.e. his time in industry] I would attend workshops with groups of people who were also in a similar situation when we had to analyse documentation such as labour law, industrial relations agreements...I found these group discussions to be very rewarding experiences where the possibility to relate in very practical ways how the proposals we were often formulated would actually apply in the real situation. I particularly regarded these learning experiences as some of the most valuable... (Portfolio text 2: 8).

This resonates strongly with the social pedagogy and social learning within RPL. He recalls that 'we were part of a group and go[ing] through this process together...I don't think I ever doubted for one moment that this was a bit of a participatory process'. He also made references to learning from others - from the questions asked and from the group discussions - especially in relation to the Usher task: 'The Usher paper was there and initially it felt quite inaccessible. By the time we had discussed it (before we wrote) - the fact that there were questions asked - it became more prevalent to me what was important - from the others asking questions at least'.

Oscar's acculturation into informal modes of learning in the context of political struggle (involving support from key political activists, sharing of information within trade unions, and his experiences of learning and working with others) engendered a strong sense of social responsibility and collectivity in knowledge production. He sees knowledge as for the 'benefit of society' rather than the individual: '...reading for the purpose of being able to use the knowledge for the benefit of society' (Portfolio text 2:8). This is similar to Deborah's stance, and shares Vusi's desire to help others and to share his knowledge.

Like Deborah, his concern for the collective is echoed in his concerns for the 'RPL community', particularly in his several references to how Vusi was coping as the other black candidate: 'And I got a sense throughout the two weeks that he was battling. I knew that. I felt sorry'. Linked to his concerns for Vusi's welfare were concerns centring on language and the use of English in the RPL process, 'Language I suppose - which for me was very important and why I kept thinking about Vusi'.

Analytical, argumentative and reflexive skills

A further area of congruence is in the area of analytical, argumentation and reflexive skills. In both of his texts, Oscar demonstrates an ability to deploy these skills to very good effect in writing. For example, he is able to critically analyse, problematise and deconstruct how ABET was initiated and implemented within his company. He does this by adopting a critical stance at three points and levels. First, he critiques management for focusing on being a 'world class company' rather than on social responsibilities in 'addressing historical imbalances':

While the guideline document...focused on social responsibility...[and] ...commitment to 'addressing historical imbalances' (apartheid), management representatives...have for the last year been considering the progress made by workers...it is management who today seem to be more rigorous in plotting the course for the ABET programme in their ability to link more clearly with it's intentions to becoming a 'World Class' company (Portfolio text 1: 3-4).

Secondly, he maintains his support of unions, but not uncritically. He critiques trade union officials for being narrowly focused on membership numbers and not discussing with workers career paths out of the industry, and not resisting the inexorable drift towards human capital discourse in ABET policy and programmes, as in: 'These business strategies should be glaring to unions that ABET programmes should provide broad skills and knowledge which goes beyond specific language, numeric and other courses which are limiting in content' (Portfolio text 1: 3). He also claims that unions have missed opportunities: 'My own view on this is that unions are not organising strategically...a lack of vigilance by unions has resulted in many workers not being given the opportunity to attend ABET classes' (Portfolio text 1:4-5). His critical engagement with certain union practices allows him to take account of workers' own instrumental motivations: 'Learners also see their learning in relation to the workplace and

their economic status being improved through education and training which is linked to job mobility at their current places of work' (Portfolio text 1:4). It also allows him to argue that workers need to be supported, by their unions, in seeing the bigger picture - for example, that companies are actually downsizing: 'In the last few years [the company] has reduced its employment levels by about four thousand [these are]...factors which education officers in trade unions and shop stewards should bring to the attention of their members' (Portfolio text 1: 5).

Finally, he critiques society as a whole for moving in the direction of credentialism and 'results being measured through the acquisition of certificates' which, he claims, undermines alternative approaches and the confidence learners have in them, 'which in the long run will not do anything for the quality of learning' (Portfolio text 2: 6).

Oscar's analytical abilities resonate powerfully with the RPL gaze. Social context is foregrounded, complex relationships between ideal and reality are represented, there is a suspicion of orthodoxies, critical reflection on his own and others' practice, problem posing and problem solving, and many connections are made, arguments developed and propositions asserted. His embodied/embedded theory is clearly very close to the critical social theory of the department as refracted through the RPL process.

The mixed bag of formal education

Evidence suggests that Oscar gained few resources from school. He refers to 'a relatively limited formal education' – 'I didn't have a very good education':

Like most people who have come through the system of conventional/ traditional school education I was exposed to passive learning as the only system or approach to learning...I always regarded education as something which was being done to me. I felt that I was learning because I had no choice (Portfolio text 2: 8).

He singles out his reading ability (particularly in relation to academic texts) as of particular concern, this despite his extensive and successful reading-related activities at work. There are numerous references to this in the data: 'I battle to deal with the reading. I link it back to my schooling days': 'I still know how poorly I read': 'I'm a lazy reader and an impatient one as well'. His technical college experience seems to have offered little respite from his distaste for and suspicion of, 'academic exposure': 'And you know, any kind of academic exposure, even at college...when I went to Technical College... the reminder of what it was like at school even though it was different at college...'. He says that he (or speaking collectively, 'we') 'never had a feeling that we could make it academically beyond school or technical college...I was made to believe that "you are not that kind of material" - certainly in school'. There was an additional sense of not being 'considered as an individual'. A real sense of pain comes through, which perhaps explains his very powerful commitment to his informal learning.

A counter to the undermining effects of apartheid education were the critical pedagogic practices that were developed in Oscar's (and several other) 'coloured' school(s), under the auspices of the Unity Movement. The main tenets of the Unity Movement were 'psychological liberation before social liberation' (Chisholm 1990: 242). Chisholm (1990: 260) (in a way that certainly applied to Oscar) argued that, despite criticisms:

...some credit must go to the Unity Movement for, in however distorted and blameworthy a manner, producing people who, wherever they have gone, have impressed others with their

critical approach, their clarity of thought, and their commitment to reading, debate and discussion.

However, although Oscar claims that 'I've come to terms with that' (i.e. his formal education) and 'broken down the barriers in my own mind', his formal education does seem to have left him with doubts. There is evidence of a lingering sense of himself as 'not academic material' (despite all his social and political achievements) which affected his confidence during RPL. He says: 'I did not believe at the beginning of the course or going through the RPL process... that I was up to it. I really didn't believe that'. The competence pedagogy of RPL seems to have helped Oscar. We were 'interested in who he was' and 'you were looking at us as individuals, at who we were and what our experiences were'.

Academic skills

Oscar's working life was closely associated with academics and academic discourse. His Usher text is worthy of examination in this regard. Despite concerns about his reading abilities, his second text clearly illustrates his abilities in this regard. He leaves the reader in no doubt that he has understood Usher. His summary of the paper is a concise and accurate synthesis of a complex academic argument. Oscar utilises a set of meta-strategies for dealing with theory: 'Usher suggests that...', 'Usher believes that...', 'Usher claims that...', 'Usher goes on to discuss...', 'In developing a link between x and y, Usher reiterates...' Furthermore, he deploys academic terms from beyond the Usher paper (from non-formal ABET workshops, perhaps): 'This constructivist approach', 'People applied their personal and social knowledge in a non-dichotomised way'.

Oscar takes issue with Usher on two counts, both of which echo his concerns for the social and public good. He suggests that Usher does not take account of the multilingual nature of society where learners are 'articulating' in English and 'lack the ability and the confidence to express themselves in the language medium of the particular subject being taught'. His second point of departure from Usher is to refer to the social context within which many teachers have been educated and their consequent inability to adopt the kind of ideas that Usher is promulgating. He suggests that their weak and variable attempts to do so may confuse learners still further¹⁷⁶. Oscar's theory of himself as a learner also carries implicit criticisms of Usher's highly individualistic model. He emphasises the social nature of his own learning. In his text, he embodies the perspective-dependence that Usher prizes (in a central concern with workers' perspectives and interests) and a social constructivist approach to knowledge, perhaps more reflexively so than Usher does. It is, however, clear that Oscar is less comfortable writing about theory than practice. There are no colloquialisms in the first sections of his Usher text (they reappear when he reverts to writing about practice in the second section, as in 'played the role of a prodger', for example).

The textual and literacy practices of Oscar's work experience come through strongly in his portfolio texts. His style is concise, concrete and pragmatic one, similar to that found in reports (including the breaking down of his text into headed sections for readability). It is not academic writing perhaps, but it is quite close.

¹⁷⁶ An interesting observation of the social pedagogy of RPL at work. This is the same point as Vusi makes in his text. Was Oscar adopting a pedagogic role in relation to Vusi? As Deborah tried to do?

Redress and restitution through RPL

It seems evident from the above analysis that Oscar's cultural capital in the 'new South Africa' was ample, even without recourse to formal qualification. Data suggest his decision to enter higher education was a highly charged one. His accounts of himself reflect both confidence and lack of confidence, as in: 'I was kind of encouraged and I was scared then'. There is much evidence of personal doubts. He was worried about what to expect from RPL and fearful that it might be a repeat of his schooling experiences: 'And it was wondering whether that was going to be a kind of repeat of that kind of experience...it's just not knowing what it was going to be like. There was always this fear you know'.

Although he sees RPL as part of consolidating a professional identity, in order (like Deborah) to contribute to the social good, he also expresses desire (and a duty) to take opportunities provided by the changed social and political context: 'the opportunities are there – now, we must make full use of it'. More specifically and personally, RPL presented an opportunity for him to *prove himself*. This is borne out by the following: 'But still we needed to prove that...it was a case for me of having to prove that and also prove to myself that I could get there'. But doubts remained. I would claim, therefore, that underlying all of the above positionings in relation to RPL is a more profound interpretation of 'opportunity' - as restitution and reparation, a chance to prove his 'real' worth, to keep 'ducking it' no longer: 'And also as a way of saying, although those people wouldn't be listening, all those teachers and the institutions of the past that I studied at "you know, you actually were wrong"'.

Discussion

In terms of knowledge, analysis has shown high degrees of continuity and contiguity, across Oscar's work, political life, community life and RPL. Informal learning has taken pride of place in his life, particularly the associated exposures to non-elitist intellectual circles and communities. There is a strongly-stated identity position, a social/political solidarity with working-class struggles and commitments to values and practices (including ABET) that are democratic and participatory. A theme of achievement and accomplishment threads through Oscar's life, although it is inter-twined with self-doubts as a result of undermining experiences of formal education. Oscar sees himself as both survivor and victim. As such, certainty and uncertainty, confidence and lack of confidence, come through in his texts. There are many retractions and qualifying statements in his interviews.

It is obvious that Oscar had already acquired vertical discourse before RPL, largely through informal and non-formal means afforded by contacts with the political intelligentsia, the academic/intellectual grounding provided by Unity Movement influences on his schooling, and his history of debate and critical, deconstructive engagement with a variety of texts. Oscar has been exposed informally to vertical discourse though without quite knowing. He has crafted a very active learner identity based on informal learning and support (from and for others).

What light do Bernstein's theories throw on this? Bernstein argues that pedagogic acts connecting to horizontal discourse may be influenced to varying degrees by strategies from vertical discourse, and that this phenomenon is frequently class and/or privilege-based. This makes for 'closer to' relations with formal education and knowledge, and therefore increased

likelihood of academic success. This seems to be a likely scenario in Deborah's case, but Oscar's case is more complex.

The notion of distributive rules comes to the fore as a useful interpretive concept. They refer to the *means* by which knowledge and 'the thinkable' are circulated, and to the ways in which concomitant statuses and positions are defined. In the context of vertical discourses, the means to distribute knowledge are usually closely monitored and narrowly defined as through formal pedagogic means. The above analysis leads me to claim that patterns of circulation of vertical discourse in South African 'struggle' contexts were different. Intellectual activists were more open than liberal intellectuals about their individual knowledge 'repertoires'. Vertical discourse was the possession not solely of the intellectual-academic elite, but also of the intellectual-political elite, where the aim was to broaden the group 'reservoir' to effect political change. The process of distributing knowledge differently required more extensive social relations, but also in a dialectical way, strengthened those social relations and encouraged 'social solidarity' (Bernstein 1999: 160). My claim is that the political circumstances of the time changed the distributive rules of vertical discourse, and that Oscar was part of this process.

A further matter worthy of consideration is pedagogy. I would argue that, with a more dispersed distribution of vertical discourse, informal life becomes more 'pedagogised'; and that ways of being derived from vertical discourse find their way into the everyday. This breaks into Bernstein's dyad (as represented in Figure 2). The pedagogy of vertical discourse becomes enacted through local practice and communalised social relations, rather than through traditional institutional practices and social relations. Vertical discourse becomes more socially embedded outside institutional boundaries, inside the political struggle.

Analysis has addressed the way in which Oscar perceived RPL. I would claim that his perception of it was similar to his 'reading' of ABET, that in ideal terms it was a progressive principle concerned with improving the lot of ordinary people who had suffered injustice. I therefore argued that this was a populist or radical reading of the RPL competence pedagogy. Because of a lack of confidence, Oscar (like other candidates) responded positively to the competence-therapeutic aspects of the RPL pedagogy. Data contain many examples of self-awareness and disclosure. I would argue that Oscar (like other candidates) shaped the RPL pedagogy to suit his own predilections. His aim seems to have been to seek redress through RPL.

Despite self-doubts, Oscar recognised the RPL gaze. It had many similarities with his view of the world and with his learning from experience (especially its location in social and power-laden contexts, its analytical and reflexive dimensions and its textuality). He was already at home with critical social theory and certain academic practices. The only point of dissonance was that, for Oscar, life was not about 'self as text' but about the 'real world' of 'making a difference'.

In terms of realisation, Oscar was already in possession of the rules. He clearly felt more comfortable writing about practice than theory, but he was already academically competent nonetheless. RPL was about changes in confidence and confirmation of abilities. Like Marie and Deborah, it was a case of already having the knowledge, but not knowing it. RPL was about confirming and (slightly) recontextualising his knowledge.

Conclusions

As hypothesised, not all candidates were equally able to interface with the particularities of the RPL gaze, or to pick up on the signal-based style of the pedagogy and/or benefit from the social processes that supported individuals in the decoding of signals. Vusi's prior experiential knowledge was at a great distance from the RPL gaze, criteria and pedagogy. As a result, he could neither recognise nor realise and was aware of this. For him, RPL was about new learning. In order to succeed, Vusi needed one of two things (or both). First, a different RPL gaze (and by definition, a different diploma gaze) - for example, one based on oral skills and animator work. Secondly, a very different pedagogy in RPL, one that gave him access to the recognition and realisation rules. This would require a different configuration of competence and performance pedagogies.

Deborah's prior experiential knowledge was commensurate with (or equivalent to) the RPL gaze, criteria and pedagogy. In fact, she could recognise and realise, beyond what was required. She had the same knowledge, and RPL confirmed that. Consequently, it was not difficult for her to recontextualise her knowledge in the terms of the gaze, once she became aware that she was 'already in'. I would argue that this did not even involve translation (which, as discussed in the Subject Review involves changing to a different language, and which, as discussed in this chapter requires one to be in before one is). Deborah already possessed a meta-level awareness of her own knowledge and the RPL gaze, which enabled her to recontextualise her prior experiential knowledge in a conscious and particular way.

Freda's prior experiential knowledge was at a great distance from the RPL gaze etc. For her, RPL was about new learning: she needed to learn the recognition and realisation rules. She

attempted to 'plot' them, but did not succeed in fully recognizing or realizing them. In order to succeed more, Freda would need one of two things (or both). First, a different RPL gaze (with a knock-on effect to the diploma) - for example, one that was skills-based and linked in a straight-forward way to the economization of education. Secondly, like Vusi, she would have benefited from a very different pedagogy – one that ensured she acquired the recognition and realisation rules.

Marie's prior experiential learning was close to the RPL gaze and criteria, and very resonant with the pedagogy. She could recognise and realise most aspects, although she lacked confidence and found the tasks difficult. I would argue that she did translate her knowledge into the terms of the RPL gaze (involving some new learning, more than recontextualisation). The way this model of RPL was designed was fine for her.

Oscar 'presented' rather than 'translated' his prior experiential knowledge, and so I would argue that it was the same learning as the RPL gaze. He possessed the recognition and realisation rules and could present his knowledge accordingly. He was not confident about it, though, and said he would have liked stronger framing.

This RPL pilot worked well for those who already had the same knowledge as that embodied in the gaze (see Figure 1 in the Subject Review). Yet, paradoxically, previous analysis has shown that the pilot was designed as a new learning type of RPL. It worked as such for Marie. It did not work well for Freda and Vusi, who needed more new learning and a differently designed pedagogy (although Freda did manage to cross the diploma boundary). Within this model of RPL, their prior experiential learning was *not* confirmed. Whilst the competence

mode is useful for enhancing confidence, it does not teach the rule system that the candidates need if their prior experiential learning is at a distance from the RPL gaze.

In the Subject Review (Figure 1) I advanced four paradoxes of RPL and claimed that practices tend not to know whether they are concerned with recognizing the same knowledge, translating knowledge, new learning, or recognizing subjugated knowledge. All these paradoxes were reflected in this case. A further paradox emerged. In this RPL practice (and presumably others), translating knowledge requires a meta-level fluency in the recognition and realisation rules. Candidates have to know what they know, rather than just know it (as in an examination, for example). In effect, this collapses together the 'same knowledge' and 'translating knowledge' approaches. What remains is a simple divide: either candidates have the knowledge or they do not. In the case of the latter, the receiving curricula (and pedagogies) have to change, or candidates have to be 'taught' – in which case, RPL is no different to conventional educational interventions such as access programmes, and the like.

Furthermore, as RPL designers and implementers, we were not aware of our own gaze, precisely did not possess the meta-level awareness of our own knowledge that we expected the candidates to display in relation to theirs. As apprentices, we were immersed in a pedagogic discourse, but not (until now) able to explicate it. Not only did we not know our own discourse (and therefore could only signal it), we did not recognise several of the candidates' either.

Affordances

Life-work-education background prepared individuals in different ways for taking up the role of RPL candidate. Individual profiles are multi-faceted. As Cooper (2003: 63) puts it, 'modalities of knowledge come together in complex and unexpected ways'. The foregoing analysis leads me to make the following claims about combinations of prior experiential learning correlating with 'success', in this context. Four main 'affordances'¹⁷⁷ come to the fore:

1. Proximity to vertical discourses.
2. Schooled in reflective practice.
3. Clear pedagogic identity as an educator.
4. A well-developed learner identity.

Proximity to particular vertical discourses

The RPL curriculum was a horizontal knowledge structure with a weak grammar modelled on our understanding of the diploma pedagogic discourse. It drew from critical social theory and curriculum sociology. The RPL curriculum only recontextualised related resources. Other horizontal and hierarchical knowledge structures, such as management and business were not part of the RPL gaze, yet they might have been if the governing distributive rules had been located in the Official Recontextualising Field of national education policy rather than in the

¹⁷⁷ I take this term from Billet in Malcolm and Zukas (2003). It refers to opportunities for participation – 'invitational qualities'. Billet refers to opportunities in the present, whereas I use it to refer to 'past (or prior) affordances'.

particular Pedagogic Recontextualising Field of a liberal university department with a relatively free and idiosyncratic hand in the field of non-formal education.

The five candidates surveyed had varying degrees of proximity to vertical discourses, and this did not always derive from formal schooling. Any assumptions that RPL candidates (in general) abide in the realm of horizontal discourse or common-sense are clearly refuted by the above analysis. For Deborah, access to vertical discourse began early in life, in a middle-class, political family. For Oscar (and for Deborah), access came from dispersed distributions of vertical discourse in 'the struggle'. The 'pedagogisation' of everyday life was available to other candidates, although in Marie's case there were resources from the singular knowledge structures of philosophy and psychology. For Freda, the regionalised knowledge structures of business administration and management were central. She was coming from a different epistemological background – the philosophy of the market and behaviourism. Vusi, a participant in the liberation struggle, was not exposed to political or sociological theoretical resources. For him, cultural, traditional and religious knowledge were most important. He, too, was coming from a different epistemological space.

Three related 'sub-affordances' cluster around the vertical discourse affordance. First, *exposure to texts and literacy*. Following Bernstein, I would argue that such exposure 'verticalises' everyday discourses and moves them into a 'closer to' relationship with formal education. Those candidates with the most textual practices in their lives managed the textual interface of the RPL process with the greatest ease, especially those with a history of critique based on textual deconstruction (Deborah, Marie and Oscar).

Deborah made reference to the library at home and to 'thick' literature. She had a strong identity as a reader, which had carried over into her educator life in the NGO world. As we have seen, literature was always very important for Marie. She refers to herself as a self-educated person with a reading past, particularly of classical philosophical and spiritual texts. Although Oscar does not see himself as a strong reader, his working life has been dominated by texts requiring critical engagement. Vusi comes from a predominantly oral background, although he had exposure to drama scripts. Freda was familiar with business and management texts which required particular textual strategies - reading with a critical market eye and down-to-earth, organisational writing styles.

Secondly, *a history of critical thinking*. Deborah refers to her reading practices as inclined towards 'social dissenters'. Beyond that, her personal history was infused with political non-conformism and dissent. Moreover, this was theory-driven dissent as well as activism, equipping her with a deconstructive, problematising and questioning approach to assumed orthodoxies. For Oscar, critical thinking also came from the political realm. Marie is reflective and critical but not in a sociological way. It is unlikely that Freda was exposed to critical thinking as a student of public relations and communication in the seventies. The case of Vusi is instructive. He had the direct experience of forced removals and was passionately critical of all aspects of apartheid. Yet, it mattered less that he was critically located within the broad notion of struggle, and more that he did not reflect on this in an academically critical way.

Thirdly, *a contextualized understanding of self*. Analysis has shown that a key aspect of the RPL gaze was the influence of context on practice. 'Context' implied 'sociological context'. Some candidates had a history of locating themselves (and their practice) in this way. For Deborah, Vusi and Oscar it was almost automatic. Freda contextualized herself in the

corporate world (which the RPL process could not 'recognise'). Marie did not have a sociologically contextualized understanding of the self or of her practice. Hers was a psychological self.

In summary, the RPL pilot was about academic practices and standpoints. Access to vertical discourse was the prime affordance. Candidates acquired vertical discourse in a variety of informal and non-formal contexts and ways. Vertical discourse is not therefore the preserve of formal education.

'Schooled' in reflection

For the most successful candidates, reflection was highly naturalised. Marie was well-practised in introspective, personal, humanistic reflection, which she could commit to writing easily. Deborah used reflection to make continuities in her life, frequently using literacy as a broker. Vusi used the RPL space for reflection, but his was not the textual, introspective type privileged in RPL (with personal disclosure). It had more of a narrative style, without the 'distancing' resources offered by vertical discourse. For Oscar, reflection was organisational and strategic as well as personal. Most of the candidates were reflective and analytical but Deborah and Oscar seem to have a reflexive meta-level facility which served them well in this context.

A clear pedagogic identity as an adult educator

Some candidates did not have a sharply focused educator identity. For such candidates (particularly Vusi), it was difficult to bring tacit educator knowledge to consciousness. Marie

had a very conscious sense of herself as a trainer-facilitator. Freda, Oscar and Deborah had the clearest and most conscious pedagogic identities, though very different ones. Prior experiential knowledge as an educator rather than as a trainer linked with success in this context.

Overall, those candidates with non-formal and formal educator identities and associated roles found themselves in closest proximity to the RPL gaze, as embodied in the Fotheringham *et al.* text particularly. The most efficacious affordances were gleaned from non-formal educator practice at a grass-roots, community-focused level, particularly if that involved a range of roles such as policy development and critique, research, evaluation, planning, curriculum development and facilitation/ teaching, management, examining. Facilitation in such contexts usually involves a valuing of informal learning which has links into the RPL concept.

However, exposure to organisational practices that involved research, evaluation, planning for changes, analysis, developing positions, reading and consultation seem to have offered affordances – as in the case of Marie (and as long as the underpinning philosophy was constructivist).

Several candidates were not familiar with ‘adult education’ as a field of practice. Freda’s trainer role was located within ‘further education’. Marie’s main site of educator practice was ‘the organisation’. Vusi’s was ‘the community’ (but not the adult education community).

Deborah and Oscar’s practices were inside the field of adult education. As such, they were the most socialized into its regulative rules - for example, the modes of conduct and power dynamics. These chimed with the RPL gaze.

A well-developed and active learner identity

Most candidates had learner identities capable of 'equivalating' to the post-graduate level HE formal learner identity of the diploma course. How did the candidates acquire this affordance?

Marie had always seen herself as a lifelong learner; everything had a learning and personal development dimension to it. Several candidates had early experiences of apprenticeship, in Vusi's case to clan elders. Deborah, Vusi and Oscar received political mentorship. Marie's mentorship was more personal and psychotherapeutic. What is interesting about Vusi's apprenticeship to the elders is that, though deliberate, it was shaped by the need for obedience, with distributive rules clearly established and relatively non-negotiable. Freda may well have been in a similar situation. She cites the invisible presence of her strict father and, like Vusi, has a relatively conformist world view. Those candidates with a history of critique (of politics, education, government, unions, management, the ABET fraternity, etc.) were perhaps most likely to have secured this affordance - i.e. be active HE-level learners.

The social distribution of affordances

According to Bernstein, recognition rules represent distributions of power. In terms of my research question concerning power, the final question I want to address in this section of analysis relates to power and to the social distribution of past affordances. Bernstein argues that access to vertical discourses is class or privilege-based. It is clear that the RPL gaze resonated with the Western, middle-class capital of a liberal university. My sample is too

time. And it was in that big room and it was a Saturday afternoon and it suddenly – that kind of existential feeling – you’ve suddenly got it and you say ‘OK, that’s what it’s really about’.

What do Bernstein’s theories reveal about the use of Usher? The paper signified the summation of academic drift. It was taken as a ‘marker’ of the recognition and realisation rules. A final set of messages (recontextualisation via perspective) were coded into it. These were about form as well as content. On the form side, we wanted candidates who could engage with academic texts such as Usher’s, who could understand (recognise) and work with (realise) academic theory. On the *content* side, we wanted candidates who could recognise themselves within (adult) learning theory and explain/theorise their own position as learners in such terms. The rules of communication were made explicit in the strongly framed guidance for the task, and the lists of ‘dos’ and ‘don’ts’. It was clear to everyone at this point that it was the evaluative rules of the university that mattered. Usher’s paper was seen as embodying the RPL pedagogic discourse.

The final part of the last afternoon was formal – reminding candidates about deadlines and introducing a framework for organising their portfolios. Ideas for the personal ‘motivation’ text were discussed. It was suggested they:

- introduce self and context;
 - give a sense of why they want to do the diploma;
 - offer some reflections on the RPL process e.g. the relationship between prior and new learning;
 - make some comments about themselves in relation to the RPL assessment criteria;
 - make reference to any other ‘evidence’ they wish to submit in support of their application
- (Guidelines for motivation).

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

This final chapter links interpretations and claims embedded in the data analysis into a concluding discussion. Although it creates closure, there is always more that can be said. Thereafter, I address implications for RPL practices and for research. The end-pieces reflect on the research process as a whole.

Knowledge, pedagogy, power and identity in the negotiation and initial design of the RPL pilot

The departmental discursive context for the case was characterised by reflexive modernism and left liberalism. There was clearly an 'emancipatory' agenda, but not one unproblematically associated with progress. What is presupposed is the capacity of education to create a better society. Education is constructed as important to social reconstruction. This is a persuasive discourse for academics, and specifically for educators of adult educators, since it suggests a process of professionalisation through academic study. It is also persuasive for students, as it holds the promise of transformation of self and society through education. The selves constructed in this discourse are self-disciplined by commitment. In this way, academics and students draw from the same reservoir of energy. What the story hides or suppresses, is the possibility that a better society may not follow education, in which case educator and student identities and subjectivities, together with any version of a redemptive project (however tentative and constrained), are rendered extremely fragile.

For the years in question for this study, the diploma programme was a self-styled Bernsteinian product, drawing resources from critical social theory, curriculum theory, philosophy and history. Embedded in its horizontal knowledge structure was the importance of social location, induction to vertical discourse, and the deployment of critique and critical rationality to understand and explain various forms of constraint; and, from there to address the complex terms and conditions of agency that in turn translate into theoretically and analytically informed transformative educator practice/activism. The Bernsteinian influence translates into a hard boundary view of knowledge and, in this case, a curriculum (mostly) in collection code.

The invisibly constitutive presence of the dominant (departmental and diploma) discourse has been well illustrated by the frequency with which academics in the department speak about *the department* and speak *as* Robert or James in their discursively authoritative voices. Robert and James inhabited a semi-privatized discourse, in which others participated to varying degrees. Departmental social practices of status differentiation, apprenticeship and the family are illustrations of the discourse-in-action, and clear instantiations of practices Bernstein associates with vertical discourse and collection code curricula, most notably: clear hierarchies, top-down management structures, socialisation of junior staff and organisational modalities of social cohesion.

It became clear that the RPL project and pilot were thoroughly enmeshed from the outset in departmental power relations, and that existing social processes worked themselves out through the case. Before the project began, I had taken up a subject position as an apprentice in the department. This was not inevitable, because as a 'project person' I was, and could have remained, marginal. The choice to take up this identity, and the subjectivities associated with it, was an active one on my part. Coming into a university context for the first time (especially

in a new country) meant that I had not participated in such discourses, although I perceived congruence with my personal value system. I was keen to transform myself accordingly, in order to become a 'good' academic, and part of the group. The concept of discursive attachment is therefore particularly pertinent to my own position. Technologies of the self and (as Foucault would have argued) the will to power came first: there was something there that I wanted, albeit not altogether consciously.

The RPL project, though sponsored by Roy, was attached to me. I linked it to my apprenticeship, and put it to work towards the latter. That said, there was little in the way of an alternative choice from my vantage point at that time: status classifications and stratifications, apprenticeship and the strictures of family membership are powerfully disciplinary. The dominant discourse held most of the department in a very tight grip. There were few opportunities for resistance, and the ultimate sanction was exclusion. Getting the RPL project across the departmental boundary was more about my subjectivity, conduct (certain patterns of behaviour and ways of organising relations) and departmental technologies of power than it was about the project, or indeed about RPL. Once over the boundary, the project remained somewhat marginal, but was more formally structured into departmental discursive practices, through meetings etc.

The *idea* of RPL was a discursive and theoretical transgression in the department. It heralded a weakening of the classification of knowledge (a softening of boundaries), the shifting of the curriculum to integration mode, and the 'horizontalising' of vertical discourse. For many of the academics in the department, RPL was a not-to-be-trusted 'progressive' orthodoxy, in cahoots with forces that encouraged the economization of education. The diploma social

project was about producing precisely the kind of critical educators that would be capable of deconstructing such progressive orthodoxies.

Tacit technologies of power became more visibly disciplinary as the RPL pilot approached the diploma course. Robert, as guardian of the diploma, came strongly to the fore. His identity as intellectual mentor was in tension with his very high investment in the theoretical and political project of the diploma. As technologies of power intensified, so did technologies of the self. I remained the active apprentice, attempting to align and construct myself and the project in terms of dominant departmental discourses. The reintroduction of a radical RPL discourse so close to implementation (via Miriam) was very destabilizing for me, since it interfered with my apprenticeship status, and disturbed my membership of the departmental family.

The departmental workshop on RPL was run as a miniature integrated curriculum: it required content openness rather than content closure. This transgressed the normal organisation of relations in the department (to which the RPL project had hitherto adhered), these being based on oligarchic practices associated with the collection curriculum code. In the workshop, communication was also more weakly framed. Knowledge structures, authority structures and identities were temporarily disturbed: senior staff were unnerved; apprentices were uncomfortably visible.

Miriam's presence in the workshop presented a specific discursive challenge to the existing diploma curriculum. Her assertion of the imperative to recognise subjugated knowledge carried the potential to disturb radically the horizontal knowledge structure of the diploma. For her, this was part of a political project of redress, involving a radical epistemological positioning. Robert and James saw this as an inadequate basis for social reconstruction: access

to formal knowledge structures and critical social theory were required. For them, there was a tension between widening access and their own project of sponsored mobility, concerned to create a particular sort of reconstructive educator, equipped with the cognitive abilities and dispositions to further the social reconstruction of the role of educator via (Bernsteinian) analytical activism – what has been termed sociological realism. Miriam's position was also seen as problematic because of the lack of straight-forward equivalency between forms of knowledge and the absence of political or epistemological grounds to replace one form by another.

During the workshop, previously uncontested boundaries around the diploma were disturbed to the point where new things were disclosed. The workshop demonstrated how an equilibrium of status classifications and hierarchical organisations of relations was central to maintaining discursive potency. But the status quo was ultimately retained by recourse to deferral (criteria were not set), and by Robert's reiteration that the diploma curriculum was not subject to immediate change. There were several references to opportunities for project research rather than intervention. Robert suggested possible research into curriculum modalities and exploration of relationships between knowledges. The problem for Frances and me was that we were unable to understand, let alone undertake, the curriculum research that was being suggested. There were opportunities - 'chinks' - in the dominant discourse, but in order to take them up it seems one had to be fully cognisant of that discourse, which we were not. As a result, a theory of possibility for the RPL pilot became increasingly difficult to grasp.

The departmental workshop set the tone for the RPL model building that followed. The PWG subgroup kept the RPL project within existing social and discursive practices. Frances and I completed the task of devising criteria which were an approximation of the existing diploma

discourse, involving a significant shift from our earlier aspirational language of soft boundaries, radicalism, social constructionism and postmodernism. We positioned ourselves more conservatively than was actually necessary, because of an intensification of technologies of the self, and our lack of understanding of the opportunities that were presented. The incorporation (or recontextualisation) of Vygotsky's theories into the RPL pedagogic device illustrates how social theories of learning were seen as having the potential to bring prior experiential knowledge into contact with the horizontal knowledge structure of the diploma, by accelerating induction and acquisition - an academically defensible pedagogy, but one with no direct engagement with the diploma curriculum or pedagogy.

A question I have been unable to answer in the course of this study is whether the diploma could have been pursued under integrated curricular conditions, in such a way as to create a rapprochement between a social project concerned with sponsored mobility and one concerned with widening access.

Knowledge, pedagogy, power and identity in the curriculum design and implementation of the RPL pilot

The curriculum and gaze of the RPL pilot involved a recontextualisation of the horizontal knowledge structure of the diploma, whose recognition and realisation rules, Frances and I, as apprentices, were still acquiring. Materials were recontextualised for their potential to speak, in some way, to the diploma discourse. Two recontextualising principles, of which we were not fully aware, were at work. These informed the pedagogic discourse of RPL. First, practitioner knowledge was to be delimited and distanced – valued, but only up to a point. Secondly, a range of academic practices and standpoints were important: it was these that

would count. Recontextualisation involved moving discursive components from a location in a particular discursive practice, to fulfil slightly different functions in another (related) context. For example, the Usher text signalled an appropriate learner identity. The Fotheringham *et al.* text signalled features of the diploma discourse-gaze, such as contextual awareness and the value of a deconstructive, problematising approach. Technologies of power and self determined what sort of curriculum we made. We did not choose materials that valorised subjugated knowledge or alternate cognate areas. For example, horizontal knowledge structures, such as management and business were not part of the RPL gaze, yet might have been if the governing distributive rules had been located in the Official Recontextualising Field of national education policy.

We created an integrated RPL curriculum that aimed to signal the deeper knowledge principles at work in the diploma. In the end, the gaze of RPL required candidates to be critically reflective on themselves, and their practice, in a very particular and complex way: the way of the diploma. Areas of prior learning that fell outside of this gaze did not count, indeed were not seen. Given our apprentice status, we were not fully aware of our own gaze and discourse.

The pedagogy of RPL was a revolving one, a complex intertwining of competence and performance elements. In short, performance objectives were delivered in a competence style. The performance aspects of the RPL pedagogy were of the autonomous variant, again modelled on the diploma. These became increasingly more visible, as the RPL pilot proceeded, and were seen as 'progression'. The RPL pedagogy was consistently strongly framed in terms of selection and timing, and increasingly strongly framed in terms of the rules of communication. This enabled us to control the amount of prior experiential knowledge that

entered the process, and to monitor 'progression'. Other aspects of framing remained weak. We allowed the texts to do some of the teaching, leaving us free to act according to the competence model.

Research showed that the RPL candidates needed some features of the competence model to boost confidence and enable them to overcome fears about formal education (and performance pedagogy). The candidates took advantage of the personal affirmation parts of the competence pedagogy, but used other means (reading signals etc.) to decode the power and control that the competence model removed from view. The recontextualisation of Vygotsky's social learning theory provided some of them with a framework for the decoding. Those that could, pooled their shared understandings of disguised power and control, and thereby enhanced their learning in a very potent way. I have argued that that represented an intervention in the regulative discourse (the discourse which specifies hierarchies and authority structures). This was possible, because in this case the regulative discourse was weakly framed.

The candidates exploited the 'gap' between transmission and acquisition in other ways too. Each person tended to shape the 'text' of competence pedagogy in terms of his or her own background and experience. Oscar shaped it to a populist mode, Marie to the therapeutic mode, and Deborah to the postmodern. Vusi and Freda could not shape it, because they could not fully recognise it. There were layers of recontextualisation at work in the ways that different candidates appropriated aspects of the RPL pedagogic gaze according to what suited them.

Pedagogies can be seen as disciplinary exercises of power, with performance representing traditional induction into disciplinary discourse through overt technologies of power such as

classification and examination. Competence pedagogy, with its surface emphases on democratic participation, incited candidates to enact technologies of the self on themselves, and in so doing extended the reach of power. In particular, the therapeutic competence pedagogy created 'supportive' opportunities for candidates to align themselves to subject positions available in the discourse.

Some candidates were more attuned to technologies of the self than others. They were already disciplined by particular ways of thinking, and already had acquired the required subjectivities. There was, however, a confessional dimension for all candidates, through the requirements to share and disclose. In these activities, we facilitators could acknowledge, appreciate, judge or rectify, and, in so doing shape subjectivities discursively. Furthermore, portfolios invite candidates to disclose aspects of themselves, and their lives, to unknown and invisible judges, making themselves more visible in the process - as in Vusi's comment about 'spreading my wings', and Freda's heartfelt plea to the unknown assessors not to take away the new supportive community she had found.

One could argue that RPL deploys insidious, subtle and pervasive mechanisms of power with the effect of making candidates more disciplined and compliant. But, for most candidates this was an empowering and pleasurable experience, to the extent that some candidates wanted more of it – more attention, more disclosure, more discipline. Most candidates experienced RPL as synonymous with pleasure and productivity. They were convinced that they were the beneficiaries of benign forces. For Foucault, power is most effective when it operates as desire. In this case, it was desire for self-development through access to university-level study – the modernist notion of the educated self. Looked at in this way, in trying to subvert traditional discipline(s), RPL imposes different forms of discipline, even as it speaks a

language of promise, empowerment and independence. RPL requires a massive scrutiny of the self in order, ultimately, to bring the local under the gaze of the universal.

With regard to desire, we facilitators were in the same position in relation to *the department* as the candidates were in relation to us. We exercised power and were subject to it. We monitored the candidates while being monitored ourselves. As subjects of the dominant discourse, we approximated it for the candidates, furthering our apprenticeship at the same time. To think about RPL as without power, is dangerously misleading therefore. It reproduces, even as it masquerades as breaking the rules. The hidden curriculum of RPL, for facilitators and candidates alike, was to learn the language and identity positions of academia: to become subjected to a particular set of practices.

Robert and James made the assumption that learners would not be able to engage with the diploma unless they had degrees or had been socialized into departmental mores via the certificate. This research found that this was not the case. Three of the five candidates surveyed had acquired informally the recognition and realisation rules; one had acquired some level of recognition though less ability to realise; and one had not acquired either. What this shows is that vertical discourse is not the sole preserve of formal education. Successful candidates in this study had acquired the horizontal knowledge structure of the diploma (as exemplified in the RPL curriculum) by dint of 'affordances'. Four main affordances correlated with success: proximity to vertical discourse, being 'schooled' in reflective practice, a clear pedagogic identity as an educator, and a well-developed learner identity.

Proximity to vertical discourse was afforded through the 'pedagogisation' of everyday life, particularly through theoretically informed political activism. In Marie's case, vertical

affordances were derived from self-education and engagement with the singular knowledge structures of philosophy and psychology. Freda came from a different epistemological space - that of the regionalised knowledge structures of business administration and management. Vusi, a participant in the liberation struggle, was not afforded access to vertical resources. For him, cultural, traditional and religious knowledge were most important. He, too, came from a different epistemological space. Those candidates with the most efficacious affordances in this regard had had considerable exposure to texts and literacy, a familiarity with different and competing world views, a history of critical thinking, and a socially contextualized understanding of the self. In addition, theoretically informed political involvement afforded familiarity with debate and argumentation and with complex and systemic thinking.

In terms of the second affordance, for the most successful RPL candidates, reflection was highly naturalised, although it took different forms. My research has shown that the RPL process privileged an introspective form of reflection linked to verbal and textual articulation. This affordance was most common amongst those candidates with a history of personal disclosure.

Overall, non-formal educators were closest to the RPL gaze, as embodied particularly in the Fotheringham *et al.* text. Here, the most efficacious affordances were gleaned from educator practice at a grass-roots, community-focused level, especially if that involved a range of roles, such as policy development and critique, research, evaluation, planning, curriculum development and facilitation/teaching, management and examining. However, exposure to organisation-based educator/trainer practices involving research, evaluation, planning for changes, analysis, developing positions, reading and consultation also seem to have offered affordances, as in the case of Marie, and provided that the underpinning philosophy was

constructivist and not behaviourist). In terms of the fourth affordance, learner identity, candidates with a critical dimension to their learning were most likely to this benefit.

The above affordances, and the patternings within them, show that the diploma boundary was porous to particular prior experiential knowledge. It was noted that Robert and James saw NGOs as having a 'smooth highway' into the diploma. They articulated this highway by way of qualification and study. What this study did was to articulate it in a more nuanced way, in terms of affordances. This offers the beginning of a theory of 'predictive validity' for RPL (Starr-Glass 2002), particularly in relation to the recognition and realisation rules of the social sciences.

Bernstein's view is that individuals can and do acquire vertical discourse informally, on the basis of social (usually class) privilege. His claim is that recognition rules are socially distributed. This was borne out in the present study, except in the case of Oscar. I claimed that patterns of circulation of vertical discourse in 'struggle' contexts were particular. Intellectual activists were more open than liberal intellectuals about their individual knowledge 'repertoires'. Vertical discourse was the possession, not solely of the intellectual-academic elite, but also of the intellectual-political elite, with the aim of broadening the group knowledge 'reservoir', to effect political change. The process of distributing knowledge differently required more extensive and horizontal social relations. My claim was that the political circumstances of the time changed the distributive rules of vertical discourse, and that Oscar was part of this process. This, I believe, elaborates an aspect of Bernstein's theory.

There is also a recognition and realisation element to pedagogy. My research found that some RPL candidates were more comfortable and literate in competence pedagogies than others,

and that accessing the particular pedagogic mixture of RPL was difficult for some. This difficulty was expressed as the need for stronger framings and a visible pedagogy. It became clear that some modes of competence pedagogy inhibit the acquisition of recognition rules for those that most need them. Bernstein's view is that access to the competence model is socially distributed in favour of the old and new middle classes, whereas working class (children) tend to misread the cultural significance of competence practices. The present study did not make conclusive claims in this regard, but Bernstein's views are suggestive.

In terms of widening participation, this pilot intervened in the distributive rules of the diploma and made it slightly more demographically available. Normal admissions arrangements would have required all the candidates (unless they had petitioned individually via the exceptional entry route), to have studied at certificate level before progressing to the diploma. In this case, some different knowledge crossed the diploma boundary, but this was mainly corporate knowledge.

This study together with Bernstein's concepts, throw light on to why RPL is such a suggestive idea in South Africa. It has been extracted from the populist-radical mode of competence and recontextualised as a technology to fulfil certain functions in the Official Recontextualising Field of education reform and the National Qualifications Framework. It therefore retains resonances with the liberation struggle and people's education, and with the social solidarities that they engendered.

In the Subject Review (Figure 1), I advanced three types of RPL which I claimed were often conflated in the literature. My empirical study further illuminates these types. Like most international RPL practitioners, I did not know exactly what I was doing or why. During the

analysis, I claimed that academic drift (and the enactment of various technologies) shaped this case into a 'new learning' type of RPL. I would argue that this did indeed happen at the level of planning. At the implementation stage, the type changed according to the candidate.

Deborah (without a matriculation certificate) possessed the recognition and realisation rules of the RPL gaze, as well as a meta-level capacity to work with them (and even extend them).

Oscar had the rules, but not the meta-level facility. He 'presented' his texts in his portfolio and hoped for the best. Marie possessed both sets of rules, and some of the meta-level awareness.

She successfully 'translated' her prior experiential learning. Freda had partial recognition rules, but struggled to realise even at a minimal level. Vusi did not possess either the recognition or the realisation rules. A mutual lack of recognition was associated with those candidates who did not possess the rules. As facilitators, we could not recognise gazes that were at a distance from our own. In fact, there were layers of recognition and misrecognition - for example, between Freda and her students, candidates and facilitators, facilitators and department.

Relating candidates' facilities in recognition and realisation rules to types of RPL reveals that the 'same knowledge' and the 'similar to'-'translation' type of RPL both require candidates to possess already the recognition and realisation rules. The crucial issue here is that translation (the most common form of RPL internationally) requires the meta-level facility referred to above, thus confirming a fundamental paradox of RPL: you have to be in already before you are. The 'new learning' type of RPL assumes that candidates need to learn to recognise and realise; in which case, RPL is about teaching. As such, it needs to have a curriculum and pedagogy. Obviously, varying degrees of new learning will be required, depending on the nature of prior experiential knowledge and the receiving curricular conditions. In South

Africa, there is likely to be a substantial need for this type of RPL in academia, given historical inequities in formal education. The 'new learning' type of RPL does not seem to be very different from Access programmes, which provide learners with academic recognition and realisation rules over an extended period of time. In the department in question, the certificate programme fulfilled that function, alongside preparing learners for the field.

I am led to discount the 'subjugated knowledge' type of RPL, given the unlikelihood of the emergence of either a radical or radical-postmodern university, where modernist tenets fall away, in practice as well as in research. Such an approach to RPL assumes that university recognition and realisation rules retune to candidates' prior experiential learning. This requires a change of attitude towards formal knowledge. A mild form of this would be the social project of shifting academic programmes towards professional and practice-based knowledge - in Bernstein's terms, from introjected singular knowledge structures to regionalised ones. A radical form would be to exchange candidates' knowledge for academic knowledge, but only if it is knowledge possessed by someone who has been oppressed. This is an extremely radical form of identity politics, which would also involve changes in the language of instruction. The only 'chink' I can find in the subjugated knowledge model would be to explore (probably extended) ways to attune subjugated knowledge to the pedagogic discourse. In Vusi's case, this would have meant finding suitable pedagogies to link his animator-educator practice to his 'subjugated knowledge', and both of these to the pedagogic discourse of the diploma: a much-extended form of RPL, which might best be conceived of as a formal education.

In the Subject Review, I located Kolb's learning cycle as the main theoretical underpinning of RPL practice. I argued that Kolb's theory, applied to RPL, equated to a 'similar to', 'translation' type. The findings of this study suggest that this type of RPL requires a meta-

level fluency in recognition and realisation rules: in which case there is *no* learning in experiential learning theory, only confirmation of what already exists, and at an extremely high level. This may be an over-statement but, at the very least, the experiential learning mantra that mentalist reflection turns experience into learning (or vertical discourse) is seriously problematised by my research findings.

I would argue that RPL needs to RPL itself, and come clean about what it is doing. What is its social project? What social project does it want to be part of? To be socially useful, it needs to be epistemologically and politically accountable, which, as currently practised, it seems not to be. In many cases, RPL may tacitly embody a more conservative social project than the mainstream formal education it sets out to critique (which usually *does* have a theoretical and political project). Is a concept such as RPL, with roots in the Official Recontextualising Field of something like a National Qualification Framework, glossed with a competence (therapeutic, populist or radical) discourse, a suitable basis for generating transformative intellectuals, for example? Indeed, RPL might achieve the opposite of what it sets out to. This study leads me to suggest that widening access to formal education by weakening the classification of knowledge is not necessarily 'progressive', unless the regionalization process is undertaken very judiciously. Moreover, whilst universities retain performance pedagogies, it seems likely that attempts to widen participation without attention to pedagogy (and particularly to framing values), will fail, and success will be put further beyond the reach of precisely those individuals and social groups that are intended to benefit.

Finally, I propose an overarching type of RPL be added to the schema presented in the Subject Review (Figure 1). My research has shown that RPL can be all of the types originally presented, depending on the nature of the prior experiential learning and the curricula and

pedagogic conditions of the receiving context. To my mind, this requires diagnostic research and theoretically informed analysis. The problem is that designers and implementers of RPL (ourselves included), often do not know which type they are operationalising.

On the strength of this study, I propose an approach to RPL that draws on the hard and soft boundary metaphor: one that ‘knows the border and crosses the line’ (Anzaldua cited in Muller 2002: 71)¹⁷⁹. I have rephrased this as ‘know the **borders** and cross the **lines**’, to emphasise that there are borders across knowledge, pedagogy, power and identity. Such an approach has the capacity to locate RPL as a site for diagnostic and explanatory research, and for the ‘reflexive monitoring of the process of epistemological exclusion and admission’ (Millar 1996). The aim would be to generate a theoretically informed basis for designing individually and contextually appropriate RPL practices. The overarching approach is added to an augmented Figure 1 below:

¹⁷⁹ I am very grateful to Linda Cooper for bringing this quotation to my attention in the course of her own PhD work.

Position re: knowledge	Position re: boundaries	Pedagogy	Theoretical underpinning
<i>‘Know the borders’</i>	<i>Soft or hard depending on prior experiential learning and curricular conditions. Cross the line</i>	<i>A mixture depending on prior experiential learning and curricular conditions</i>	<i>Critical curriculum theory</i>
‘Same knowledge’ and meta-level facility	Soft	Translation	Experiential learning
‘Same knowledge’	Soft	Equivalence and knowledge ‘matching’	Experiential learning
‘Different from knowledge’	Hard	New learning and induction	Neo-Marxism
‘Subjugated and preferable knowledge’	Change the boundary	Counter-privileging	Critical theory and/or radical postmodernism

Figure 6: Know the borders and cross the lines.

Working in the above way, would be time-consuming and demanding, of that there is no doubt. However, perhaps the above model could be tested as a theoretical basis for a wider range of developments aimed at widening participation to adults i.e. wider than just ‘RPL’.

Implications: Beyond the hidden curriculum

It is important to recall that my study is a portrait of a single case, in terms of knowledge, pedagogy, power and identity. A poststructuralist view would be that I have contributed to languaging the RPL practice back into being. I can only hope that I have not attributed an emancipatory narrative to it. My intention has been to make some modest knowledge claims and not to generalize. This section should therefore be seen as, at most, a set of pointers for future developments, with what Hammersley (in Gomm 2000) refers to as a degree of 'naturalistic generalisation'.

I address implications for practice *and* for research together, because my thesis is that RPL practices would benefit from being research-based. The proposals that follow elaborate my overarching position - know the borders and cross the lines. They fall into two curricular groupings: knowledge and pedagogy, both of which have power and identity dimensions and ramifications.

Theorising knowledge (curricular) conditions

This case study leads me to suggest that RPL needs curriculum theory. Bernstein's concepts offer some generative starting-points. Designers and implementers of RPL could develop the means to become theoretically aware of the gaze/discourse of mainstream curricular contexts within which candidates have to be able to recognise and realise, if they are to be successful in the longer term. Different curricular logics could be described and explained. Findings at the level of individual programmes could be aggregated into broader categories, such as differences between undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in particular cognate areas.

Bernstein's theories, and this research, suggest that RPL will work best under horizontal rather than hierarchical knowledge structures, and under integrated rather than collection curricula conditions. This is because horizontal knowledge structures are less strongly classified. There are similarities between horizontal knowledge structures and horizontal discourse¹⁸⁰ in terms of serial and segmental structuring, porous boundaries, tacit modes of acquisition, and the notion of gaze as a means of appropriating particular cultural realities. But Bernstein argues, some things need to change to enable successful incorporation of horizontal discourse into vertical discourse. RPL could therefore focus on these matters, which relate to the changing of the 'space, time, disposition, social relation and relevance' of horizontal discourse. This might involve recontextualising and theorising horizontal discourses within an RPL curriculum. Interestingly, this is what some RPL practices do (see for example, Mandall and Michelson: 1990), but the tendency is invariably to assume that prior learning is being recognised, when in fact it is being used as the basis for embarking on a process of 'new learning'. It is also the kind of curricular practice common to women's studies, black studies etc. Such an approach could resonate with Oscar's experience where increased exchanges took place between vertical and horizontal discourse through changing reservoirs, repertoires and distributive rules.

If RPL is to be conceptualised as a two-way bridge between existing mainstream curricula and prior experiential knowledge, it is likely that the former will need to move in the direction of regionalization and integrated code. Movement towards an integrated curriculum has significant pedagogical implications, which seem to be in need of empirical testing.

¹⁸⁰ This is not to suggest that prior experiential knowledge is horizontal discourse. As my research has shown, the contrary is frequently the case. However, some prior experiential knowledge will inevitably be horizontal.

Bernstein's models make it clear that in the integrated code, the concern is to teach the abstract, deep and general principles of the knowledge structure, and to draw attention to the concepts through which particular principles and ways of knowing are inculcated through the longer process of induction associated with collection code. However, as discussed, change would need to be undertaken in a theoretically judicious way, so as to balance the benefits of widening participation against drawbacks associated with the economization of education. This links to the perceived social project of RPL. It may simply be more 'progressive' to leave existing programmes alone.

On the basis of diagnostic research, RPL is likely to be different for different people in different contexts. Where prior experiential knowledge is close to the curricular and pedagogic conditions of the context, as in the 'same knowledge' type of RPL, then candidates will only need opportunities to practise, confirm, and develop confidence in their possession of the realisation rules. This could involve working with recontextualised mainstream curriculum texts. Where there is a distance between prior experiential learning and the receiving gaze, 'new learning' RPL will need to induct candidates into the recognition and realisation rules. To reiterate a point made by Robert, this type of RPL is little different from any other educational process. There is nothing inherently special about it.

Theorising pedagogic (curricular) conditions

I would also suggest that RPL could benefit from pedagogic theory, especially in cases where 'new learning' is required. In my view, Bernstein's theories offer some extremely useful ways of theorising and conceptualising RPL pedagogy. On such a basis, pedagogies could be consciously explored and selected. As this study found, unconscious mixtures of competence

and performance pedagogies can result in a conflicted role for facilitators. Rather, a range of mixtures of competence and performance pedagogies could be researched and required. As my research has shown, too much competence pedagogy can create a comfort zone that inhibits the acquisition of recognition and realisation rules, for those who need them most. However, the personally affirmative elements of competence are generally welcomed by RPL candidates. The disguising of power and control is not helpful, especially to candidates at a distance from the gaze.

Strong and weak framing also provide potentially generative bases for pedagogic research and development. In this case study, some candidates asked for stronger framings. They wanted the rules of communication to be made more explicit. Oscar wanted feedback and debriefing about his knowledge, in relation to the evaluative rules of the RPL pedagogic device. A very wide range of framing values is possible, including alternations between relaxed and strong framing. Strong framing of pacing would mean that candidates were not so much in control of their own learning. This might be useful for 'new learning' RPL. The rule of thumb would be to research combinations of framing values that equip candidates with the recognition and realisation rules in the most efficacious ways.

Experiential learning methodologies do not seem to have much to offer RPL, especially in the case of candidates that need new learning. I would argue that it is necessary to avoid their unconscious humanism, especially in relation to mode of reflection. A recurrent issue in my research was the automatic requirement that candidates reflect in an introspective way, and articulate the fruits of that reflection. This approach would benefit from further problematisation and other understandings of reflection pursued. Social learning worked well

in our case, but only for those candidates that could recognise and realise that particular aspect of our pedagogic gaze.

A further issue for exploration might be how much of the recognition and realisation rules have to be acquired by RPL candidates. In my study, the recognition and realisation rules of RPL were basically the same as those required for traditional diploma entrants. As research has shown, recognizing and realizing frequently requires a meta-level translation facility. For candidates with tacit, embedded knowledge, should the facilitators or the assessors do the translating? The answer to this question would involve the staff recognizing and realizing the candidates' gaze. Might it be possible to recognise prior learning on the basis of recognition alone, or without full realisation? For example, realizing orally would not require meta-level facility. There is scope here, I believe, for an interface between RPL and academic development staff with regard to ongoing support for ex-RPL candidates within mainstream contexts.

It is clear from the above that RPL (as widening participation) would benefit from being centrally located in institutions, as theoretical work. To my mind, it has the capacity to fulfil political objectives, but only on the basis of academic research, across disciplines.

In summary, the developmental model I am proposing involves researching relationships three-ways: between mainstream curricular knowledge and pedagogy, RPL curricula and pedagogy, and prior experiential knowledge. There are a great many possible permutations which could be empirically tested. As a result, it might be possible to further enhance the 'predictive validity' of RPL (Starr-Glass 2002), by developing a retrospective critical mass of

research data regarding those affordances that correlate with success in particular contexts, which in turn could be used to refine the approaches that are being developed.

End-piece

Reflections on the strengths and weaknesses of using Bernstein and Foucault

As anticipated, I found both theorists' concepts generative. But on reflection, using so many concepts was ambitious and may have impacted negatively on my study. My study might have achieved a more detailed level of focus by using fewer. It is clear that Bernstein's theories assumed most authority in my account. They appealed to me because of my pre-theoretical disposition as a 'structuralist typologist', of which I was not conscious before the PhD. They also appealed to the part of me that likes to explain and build scenarios of possible educational interventions. Moreover, Bernstein's theories were resonant with the context under exploration, which, to a large extent, was modelled on his work. The possibility of using detailed theoretical description and analysis as a means to envisage alternative future pedagogic possibilities which decrease the wastage of human potential and are more socially just, is something that I locate at the centre of my endeavours as an educationist – linked to a sense of a politics of the long haul. I think Bernstein offers powerful resources for that. A drawback of his oeuvre is that it is based on a view of knowledge and understanding as consciousness, which leads to a notion of acquisition as internalization. I think that bringing the work of social practice theorists such as Lave and Wenger and Rogoff into alignment with Bernstein would be generative in this regard, particularly because the social practice theorists tend to lack a theory of power. The pedagogic space of RPL could be used to try out guided participation and/or participatory approbation. Such an approach would go some way to

offsetting criticisms that teaching the discourse of collection code curricula results in that knowledge becoming 'data', rather than an inculcated way of thinking and being. The same applies to Schon's work. Is there a link with Bernstein's concepts and the notion of the reflective practitioner? Likewise, the work of Eraut, particularly his concepts of implicit, reactive and deliberate learning which are suggestive in terms of researching affordances related to successful access to formal education. Finally, I would like to find conceptual resources better able to research the complex modalities of prior experiential knowledge. I did not find Bernstein's concepts particularly useful in this regard. They are more efficacious in relation to analysing curricular knowledge and its transmission.

Given the dominance of Bernstein in my study, Foucault's concepts moved to the margins, despite my intentions. I am not therefore in a particularly strong position to comment on his work, as I feel I have not explored or exploited it to the full. I experienced a lack of potential for envisioning alternative educational futures. My Foucauldian findings felt somehow pre-scripted and predictable. For, example, RPL can be seen as a profoundly normalising activity, concerned with the streamlining and management of learning from experience. The critical question is what is the alternative? Of course, there is room for the renegotiation of relationships and for the removal of negative power-effects, but I wondered whether Foucault's concepts were fine-tuned enough to envisage the particularity of alternatives. Therefore, although Foucault's concepts are very generative in terms of mapping the productivity and constraints attached to power in modern social formations, they are, to my mind, less clear about the 'so what' question.

Reflections on my own philosophical position

I welcomed the opportunities presented by this study to reflect on my default ontological and epistemological position. I had no idea of my philosophically modernist side or of my strong sense of the value of formal and foundational knowledge. Learning about my own position was therefore very revealing. On the strength of this PhD, I now feel able to deploy different postures, including continuity postmodernism, but my default positioning is always likely to incline towards that brought to consciousness by this study. An example of this was when it was brought to my attention that there was nothing particularly Foucauldian about my Foucauldian analysis (in this study). I was, I believe, recontextualising Foucault's concepts in line with my own philosophical position. For instance, I would argue that I retained a somewhat mentalist, rather than a social practice, view of discourse. Although this was not planned, it might have led to me missing opportunities.

As discussed in my philosophical chapter, I am of the view that it is usually necessary to go through the profoundly normalising formal knowledge route in order to develop any kind of alternative position (including a poststructuralist one). That is as true for me in this thesis as it was for RPL candidates. It is those who know the rules who can disturb them most effectively. This perhaps explains why I was not ready for poststructural research, and why the reflexive dimension of this study does not go as far as I envisaged it might.

Reflections on myself as researcher

As Usher *et al.* (1997: 210) write, 'When we do research what we see reflected is ourselves located in our biography and culture'. I came to realise that this PhD involved very particular

enactments of technologies of the self. I have completed my discursive apprenticeship to the dominant discourse of my first academic department, through this PhD. RPL and the PhD became fused with my own identity and a particular set of subjectivities. I have taken up the opportunities missed in 1997. The departmental discourse was still shaping me during this PhD. As was pointed out to me, there are two narrative voices at work in this PhD – the apprentice and the PhD researcher. Perhaps now, being fully enmeshed in power-knowledge and discipline, I am ready for Foucault.

Limitations of this study

I think this research meets the research quality criteria set out in the Introduction. However, there are two areas of weakness, in my view. In the Research Design chapter, I drew attention to the status accorded to data. This links to my plausibility criterion. I noted a tendency to take data at face value, and added two correctives. First, I argued that I would treat data as informed reflexive statement, and secondly, that I would offset essentialism by triangulating different forms of data. I have done this as far as possible, but in future research I would seek to problematise the status of data more rigorously. For example, I would draw attention to how interviewees represented their knowledge and to influences on people's constructions of the world. This might enable me to tell a more complex story, or range of stories.

The second limitation relates to what I perceive as a missed opportunity to address time and hindsight issues in this research. I was aware that the RPL candidates had several opportunities to tell their stories of RPL – in their portfolios and in two interviews. I did not explore fully changes in perspectives over time, although I did do so occasionally. The main reason for this is that I did not notice any major shifts in views and identities. Rather, the

converse - early views remained constant. I would suggest that one reason for this was that by the time of the second interviews, the candidates and myself were more or less part of the same discourse community. We were all being shaped in the same way, and all enacting similar technologies of self. There was a sense of the candidates having arrived at a version of the RPL process that suited their stage of identity formation. With the academic interviewees, the issues were different. The department had been disestablished and there was a historically reflective dimension to the data. In some ways, this research is my representation of an aspect of the history of the department, very much shaped by the dominant discourse. There were other stories that could have been told, although the one told here is an important one.

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APPENDIX A: EXTRACTS FROM INTERVIEW SCHEDULES

Schedule for candidates

1. [As a warm up]What do you recall as the key stages and processes within the RPL pilot?
2. Thinking of yourself *before* RPL and *as* you entered the process – how would you describe yourself? How do you now see yourself at that point?
3. [Focusing on knowledge specifically] What knowledge or knowledges did you come with?
4. Thinking of yourself *during* the RPL process – how would you describe yourself?
5. How did you experience the process? What was required of you?
6. [Focusing on knowledge specifically] What happened to your knowledge(s) inside the RPL process? How? When?
7. Did your understanding of what counted as knowledge in RPL change during the process?
8. Think of yourself at the *end* of the RPL process - how would you describe yourself? How did you see yourself at that point?
9. So, did RPL change you? Can you give a 'before and after RPL' view of yourself?
10. How do you see yourself and your experience of RPL in relation to, or as compared to, other candidates?
11. How would you describe your knowledge in relation to the knowledge of other 'actors'?
12. Do you think RPL changed others? Other candidates? Researchers/ practitioners? Other academics in the department?
13. [I'd like to focus on one moment in the RPL process – a significant one for you – for any reason - positive or negative] Can you identify a moment in the process that was particularly significant for you?
14. I'd like to pick up on one thing that sticks in my mind about your involvement in RPL and maybe you can comment on it:
15. [To end] Thinking back over the whole RPL process:
 - A. What, in your view was this RPL process about? If you had to throw all the balls in the air – what was its main message?
 - B. What was most important for you in this RPL process?
16. Is there anything you've really wanted to say, but haven't? Any burning issues for you? Any final thoughts?
17. Are there any questions you would like to ask *me*?

Schedule for academics

1. What do you recall as key stages and processes within this broader notion of the 'RPL pilot'?
2. Let's focus on *yourself* in the process. Thinking back, how do you see yourself within the process? Perhaps you could offer a 'portrait' of yourself at various points...
3. So, did your position change in any way during the process? Were there shifts? If so when, how and why did they happen?
4. How did you see yourself and your positionings in relation to other 'actors' within the pilot? Other academics in the dept? RPL researchers/practitioners? The candidates?
5. Do you think the RPL pilot changed others – other academics in the department? The RPL researchers/practitioners? The candidates? How?
6. Let's focus on knowledge, what do you think happened to RPL candidates' knowledge(s) during this RPL process? How? When? Why?
7. So what counted as valuable knowledge (for candidates) in this RPL process? And how?
8. How did your knowledge relate to and interact with the knowledges of other academics including the RPL researchers/practitioners? The knowledges of the RPL candidates?
9. You mentioned that xxxx was a significant moment in the process for you
Or What was the most significant moment in the RPL process for you?
10. Was there 'discipline' in this RPL process?

11. Finally, I'd like to pick up on one thing that sticks in my mind about your involvement in RPL and maybe you can comment on it:
12. Closing – an open space for discussion
13. Are there any questions you would like to ask *me*?

Schedule for co-facilitator

1. [To help the memory]What do you recall as key stages and processes within this broader notion of the 'RPL pilot'?
2. So, you were involved throughout?
3. What were your views about RPL prior to empirical work?
4. Can we focus first on the processes *before RPL* – i.e. the planning/model building stages.
5. Can you identity a moment in the planning/model building process that was particularly significant for you?
6. How do you see yourself in relation to others during the planning – I'm particularly thinking of other academics in the dept and Elana and myself?
7. What were your relationships to others? Exemplification
8. [Focusing now on *the RPL process itself*] What sense did you have of the candidates as they *entered* the RPL process?
9. *What sense did you have of the candidates during the process?*
10. What do you think happened to the RPL candidates' knowledge(s) during the RPL process? How? When? Why?
11. [Focusing on *yourself* during this time] What were you required to do? When? How? Why?
12. What seemed to count at the point of assessment? What were you required to do?
13. Can you identity a moment inside the RPL process that was particularly significant for you?
14. Did RPL change you in any way? Were there shifts in your views and/or knowledge?
15. Do you think the RPL pilot changed other academics in the department?
16. Do you think the RPL pilot changed the candidates?
17. I'd like to pick up on one thing that sticks in my mind about your involvement in RPL and maybe you can comment on it:
18. A final word on the whole RPL process:
 - A. What, in your view was this RPL process about? If you had to throw all the balls into the air – what was its main message?
 - B. What did it offer you?
19. Any final thoughts?
20. Are there any questions you would like to ask *me*?
21. Are there any questions you would like to ask *me*?

APPENDIX B: POSITION STATEMENT

Dear Candidate,

Thanks very much for agreeing to be interviewed on Wednesday 8th November at 9.30 am – at your home. My PhD data gathering is focusing on a case study of the RPL pilot project in the [department].

The interviews will be designed with particular foci and will be different from what we did before. I am looking at RPL in terms of 'boundaries' and 'boundary work'. The boundaries I am particularly interested in are around identity positions, knowledge and power. So, my questions will cover things like: your sense of yourself and others within the pilot and how those changed or didn't; understandings of what counted as knowledge; significant and 'power-full' moments within the RPL process – for any reason, positive or negative.

I am aiming to get everyone's version of the particular social reality - at the meanings each person accorded to the practice. If you have time before the interview, it might be useful to re-view your RPL portfolio and/or some of the materials used.

I envisage the interview as a dialogue/discussion – lasting no more than one and a half hours. I would like to tape record the interview – although neither the institution nor individuals will be identified in the final thesis. I would also be keen on circulating a draft of my analysis for your comments at a later date if you would be interested.

Please contact me if you wish to discuss any aspect of this.

Look forward to seeing you next Wednesday.

Very best wishes
Judy

APPENDIX C: CODING SCHEMA (EXTRACT)

Theme/content analysis

Coding schema. Draft 8: 15.09.01

**RPL as boundary work: an exploration of knowledge - identity positions - power
(What? Whose? Where/When? How?)**

Code: Knowledge beyond the project

Com: e.g. And knowledge practices - in field, in academia, in RPL generally, in national policy. NOT candidates' prior knowledge

Code: Knowledge in project

Com: e.g. And knowledge practices - in relation to the RPL project as a whole - not just the pilot

Code: Knowledge in dept

Com: e.g. Knowledge practices in the dept (as a whole or held by individuals), not specifically in relation to the project or the pilot

Code: Knowledge at boundary of project/pilot and dept

Com: e.g. Knowledge and knowledge practices occurring between the pilot/project and dept.

Knowledge and knowledge practices occurring in the pilot planning workshop held in the dept on (date). And knowledge and knowledge practices occurring in special intra-deptl mtgs set up to support planning the pilot - PWGs etc

Code: Candidates' knowledge entering the pilot

Com: E.g. candidates' accounts of their prior knowledge i.e. the experience and knowledge they came in with including their knowledge about RPL

Code: RPL pedagogy

Com: Methods, styles, processes of teaching and learning. And candidates' activities inside the process. What knowledge counted? What knowledge looked for? Markers of value? How communicated?

Code: Knowledge at RPL assessment

Com: What knowledge counted? What knowledge looked for? Equivalences and commensurability of different knowledges

Code: Learner identity

Com: References that pertain to what I as analyst think is an identity position and/or to how interviewees refer to themselves irt general and pre-RPL - including school

Code: Candidate identity

Com: References to identity within RPL including learner identity within RPL

Code: HE learner identity

Com: References to a more generalised HE identity perhaps developing in the diploma and thereafter

Code: Writer identity

Code: Practitioner/educator/trainer identity

Code: Society identity

Com: Other identities as a (South African) adult - including political etc

Code: Work identity

Com: References to work identities other than as practitioner/educator/trainer

Code: Academic/adult educator identity

Com: References to academic identities within the dept mainly

Code: Assessor identity

Com: References to facilitators and academics who played this role

Code: Facilitator identity

Com: References that pertain to what I as analyst think is an identity position and/or to how Janice refers to herself

Code: Researcher identity

Com: References that pertain to what I as analyst think is an identity position and/or to how Janice refers to herself

Code: Power beyond the project

Com: E.g. circulations, manifestations in field, in academia, in RPL generally, in national policy

Code: Power in project

Com: E.g. circulations, manifestations in the RPL project as a whole - not just the pilot

Code: Power in dept

Com: E.g. circulations, manifestations in the dept generally, not specifically in relation to the project or the pilot

Code: Power at boundary of project/pilot and dept

Com: e.g. circulations, manifestations at the boundary between the pilot/project and dept

Code: Power in planning

Com: e.g. circulations, manifestations in the pilot planning workshop held in the dept on (date) and in special intra-deptl mtgs set up to support planning the pilot - PWGs etc

Code: Power on entering the pilot

Com: E.g. circulations, manifestations as candidates entered the pilot

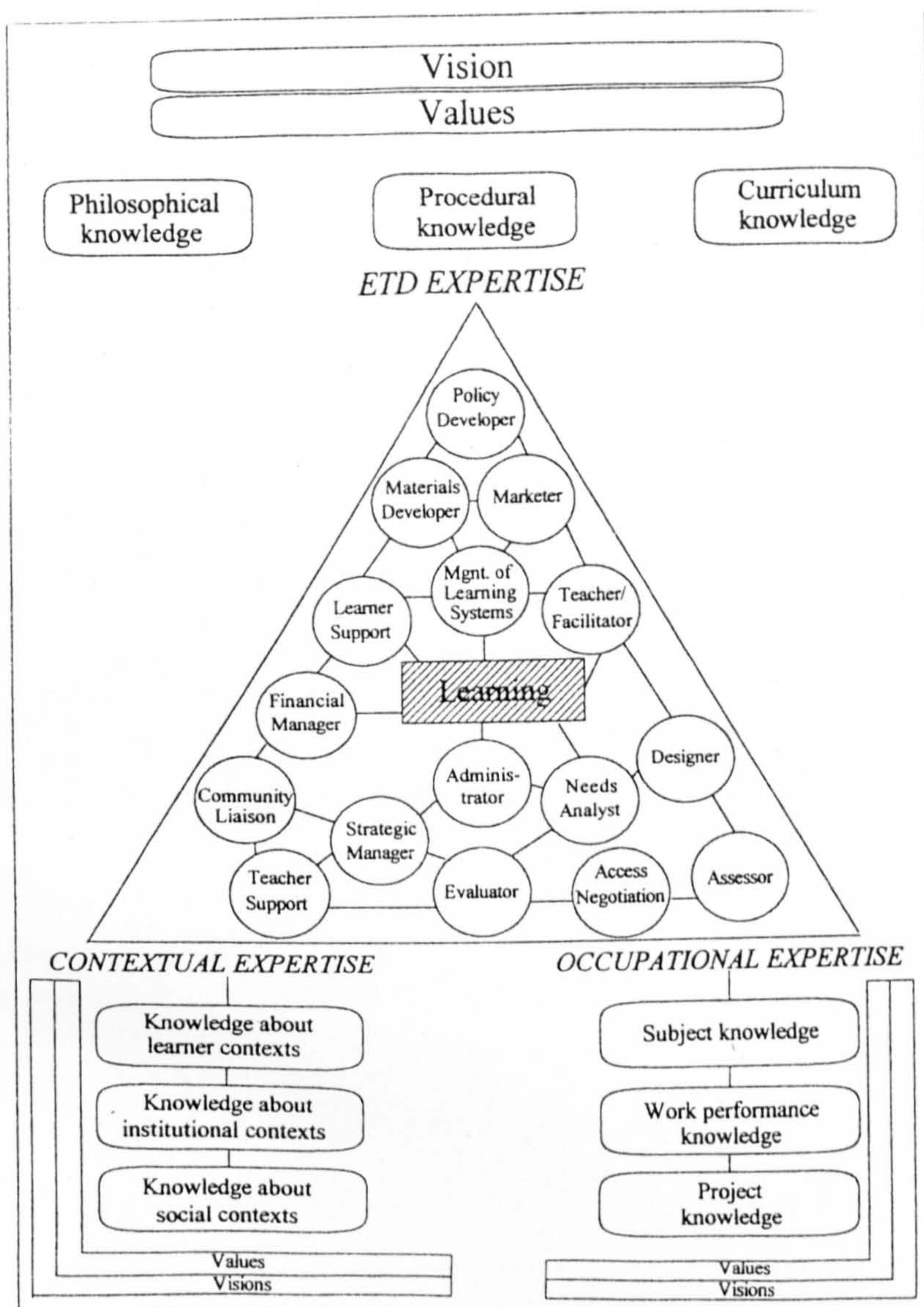
Code: Power inside RPL

Com: E.g. circulations, manifestations inside RPL.

Code: Power at RPL assessment

Com: E.g. circulations, manifestations

APPENDIX D: QUALITY FRAMEWORK



NTB (1997) Phase 2 Report: Education, Training and Development Practices Project, Johannesburg: NTB and GTZ